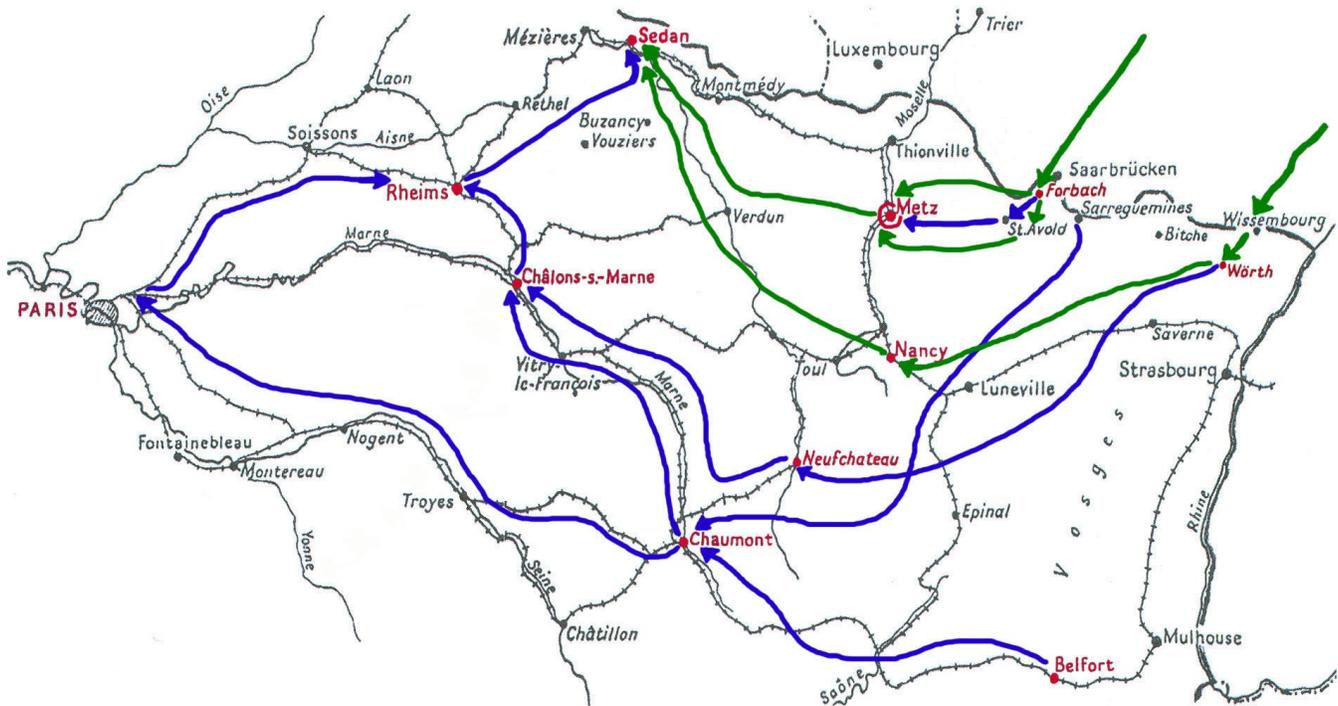


## The Postal History of the Imperial Phase of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War

**Background:** On July 19, 1870, Napoléon III's French empire declared war on King Wilhelm's Prussia. On August 6, the German imperial armies decisively defeated the French imperial Armée du Rhin at Forbach and Wörth, in the opening stage of the Alsace-Lorraine campaign.



**Bifurcation and pursuit of the French army (blue) by the German armies (green)**

Split in two by the defeats, half of the French army retreated to Metz, where the August 19 - October 27 siege ended the Alsace-Lorraine campaign. The other half followed a circuitous retreat to Châlons-s-Marne to become the Armée de Châlons. That army and Napoléon III surrendered on September 1 at Sedan after a pursuit by two German armies in the Ardennes campaign. Thus, the imperial phase of the war included two campaigns and multiple sieges:

**Alsace-Lorraine Campaign** from Metz to Belfort: July 19 to October 27

**Ardennes Campaign** from the frontier to Châlons and then to Sedan: August 7 to September 1

**Sieges of Fortified Cities** by the imperial German army: Strasbourg, Metz, Neuf-Brisach, Schlestadt, Belfort and Verdun.

**Postal Background:** The French and Germans provided military postal services (fieldposts) at the divisional, corps and army levels. Both sides extended free-frank privileges to military personnel, so the vast majority of fieldpost mail is stampless.

**Scope and Study:** This exhibit traces the entire conflict through letters mailed at the French and German fieldposts, through other military-related mail, and through siege mail.

**Presentation:** The exhibit is organized by campaign, which is identified in the heading of each page. The military activity or siege is identified in the sub-headings. Text boxes provide historical or postal background, and greater detail is provided in the body of the page. Finally, icons at the upper right identify French or German armies, battles between them, or sieges.

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Historical Summary: July 14 – October 27



- France mobilized its Armée du Rhin on July 14, 1870 and moved to positions on the frontier between Metz and Belfort.
- The August 6 defeats at the frontier forced the Armée du Rhin to fall back on Metz. After three large battles around Metz, the French were besieged there, starting on August 19. After one final effort to break out on August 31, the French surrendered on October 27.
- As part of this campaign, German imperial armies also besieged Strasbourg, Neuf-Brisach, Schlestadt and Belfort.
- Armée du Rhin divisions were given lettered fieldpost postmarks. The army and corps postmarks identify the unit.
- All German fieldpost postmarks identify their associated unit.



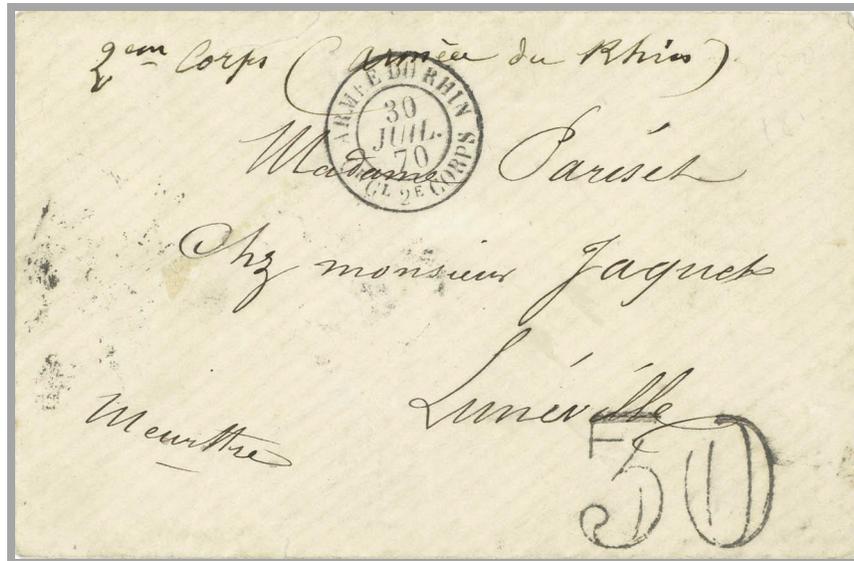
Political cartoon sent as printed matter – received military free frank per July 24 Law  
Postmarked in red on August 2 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Division Bureau A at Strasbourg

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### French Mobilization: July 14 - August 5



The 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> Corps and the Garde Impériale were mobilized on July 14. Some fieldpost bureaus were in operation by July 30. Virtually all fieldpost mail received a military free frank per a July 24 Law.



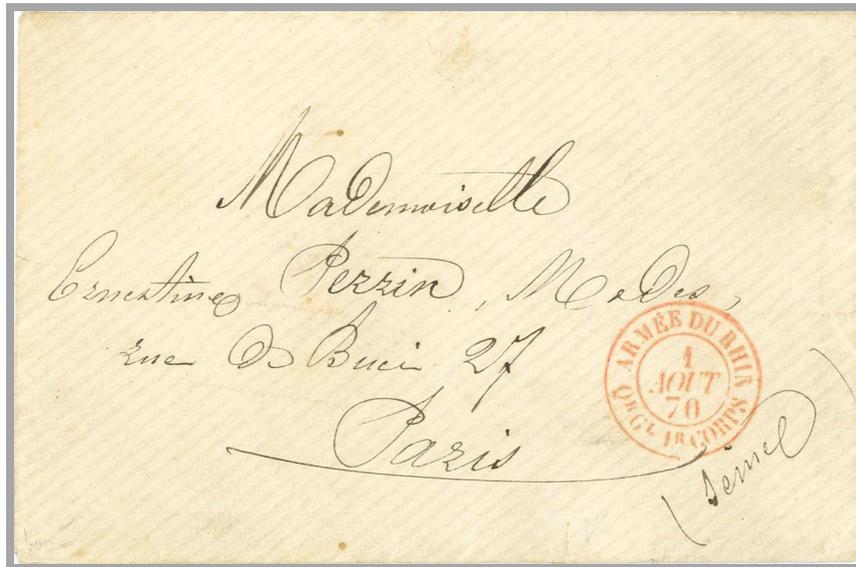
Posted July 30 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps HQ bureau – **earliest known fieldpost date**  
Lunéville incorrectly assessed 30c due (20c plus a 50% unpaid fee) on July 30



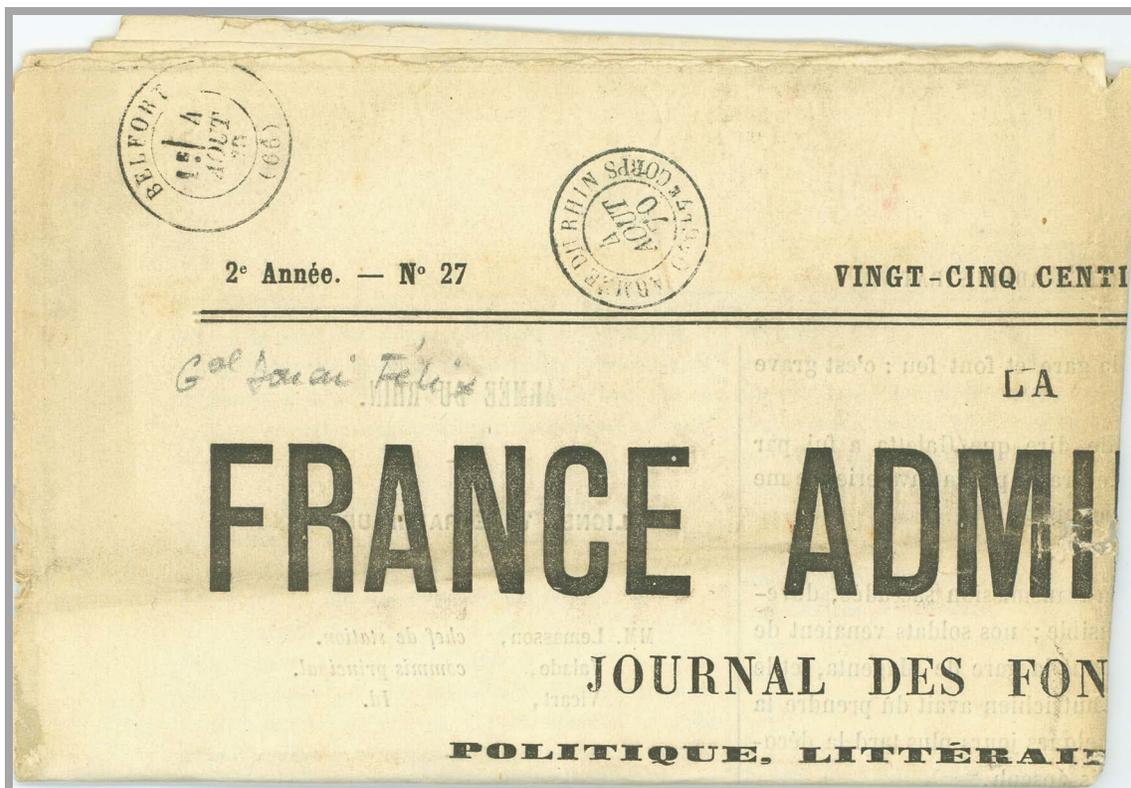
Dated August 4 at Saarguemines and posted at the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ bureau  
5<sup>th</sup> Corps fieldpost postmarks are **known only from July 31 to August 4**  
Fieldpost materials were lost during the August 7 retreat from the frontier

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## French Mobilization: July 14 - August 5



Posted August 1 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps HQ bureau in Strasbourg – **1<sup>st</sup> Corps used red postmarks**



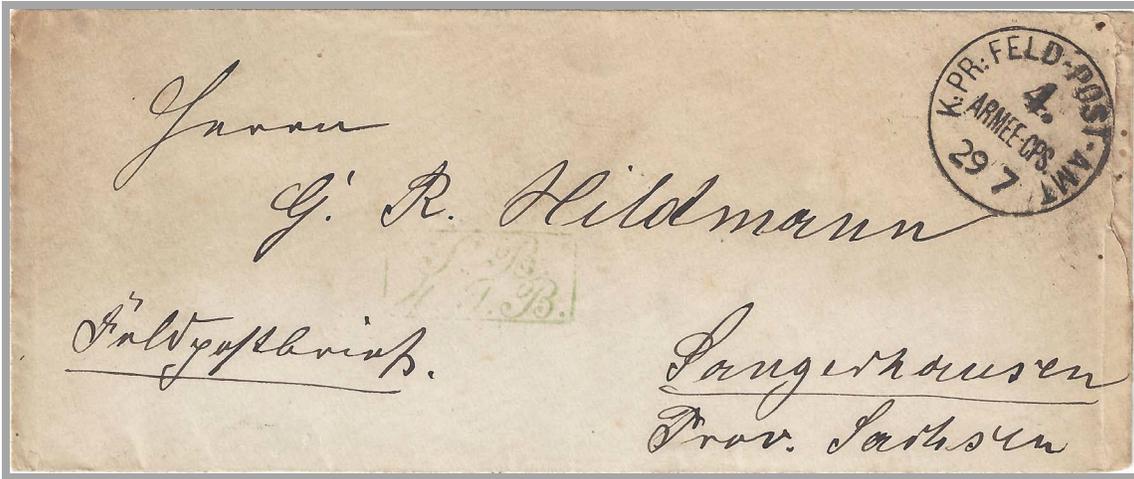
Newspaper postmarked in Belfort on August 4 – prepaid 5c per Timbre Impérial handstamp  
Addressed to Général Félix Douay, commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps at Belfort  
August 4 7<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ postmark used upon arrival – **fieldpost arrival postmarks are rare**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

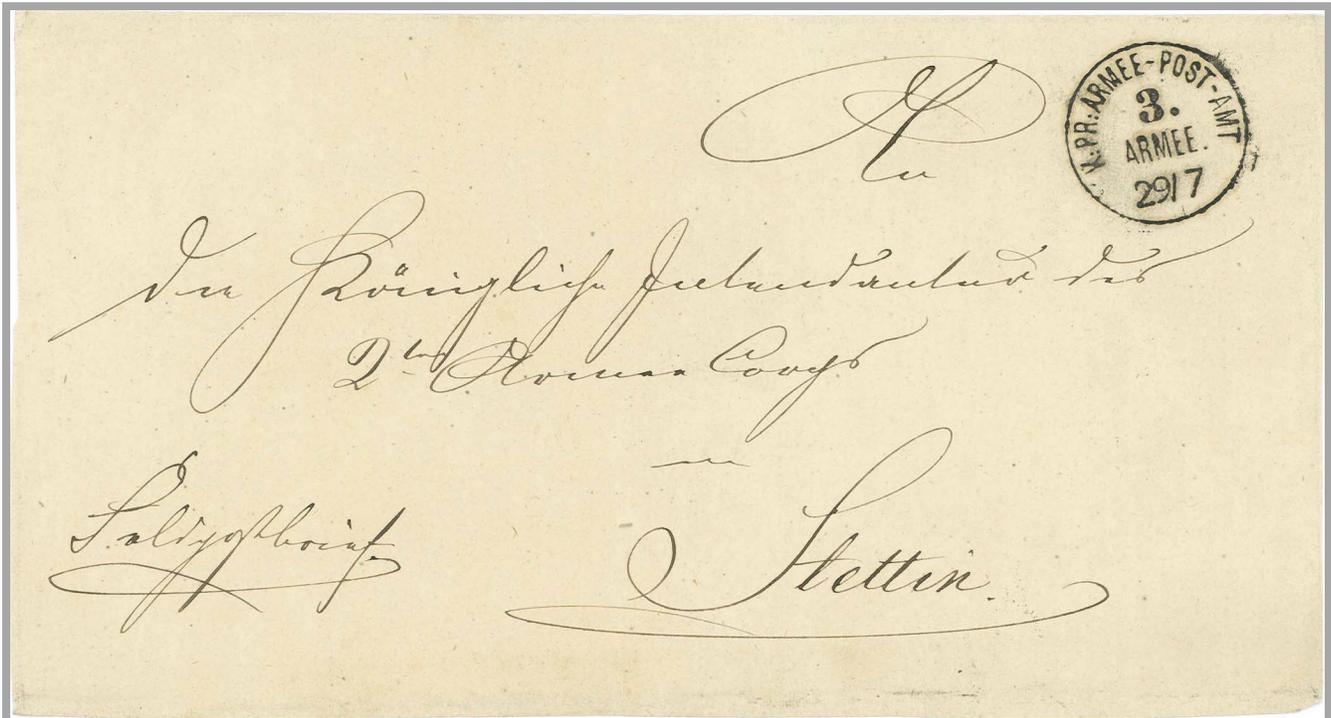
### German Mobilization: July 15 - August 5



The German I, II and III Armies began mobilization on July 15, a day after the French. The fieldpost service also mobilized and was operational by July 29. Virtually all fieldpost mail received a military free frank.



Posted July 29 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ bureau in Germany - **earliest known fieldpost date**  
From the 4<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Battalion in the II Army - arrived in Langerhausen on August 1



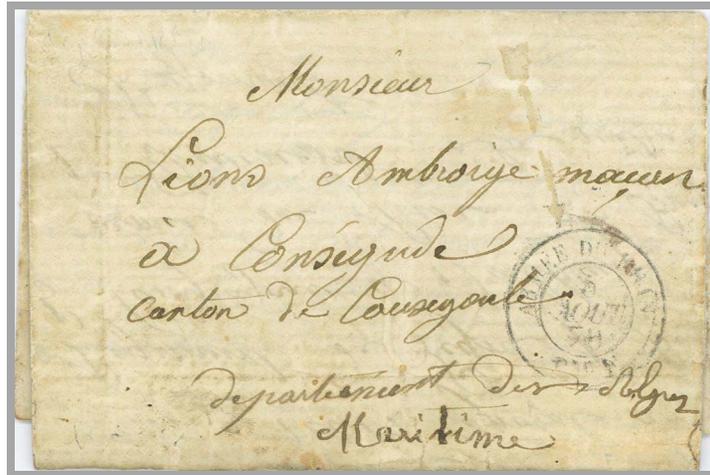
Posted July 29 at the III Army bureau in Germany - addressed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps at Stettin

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

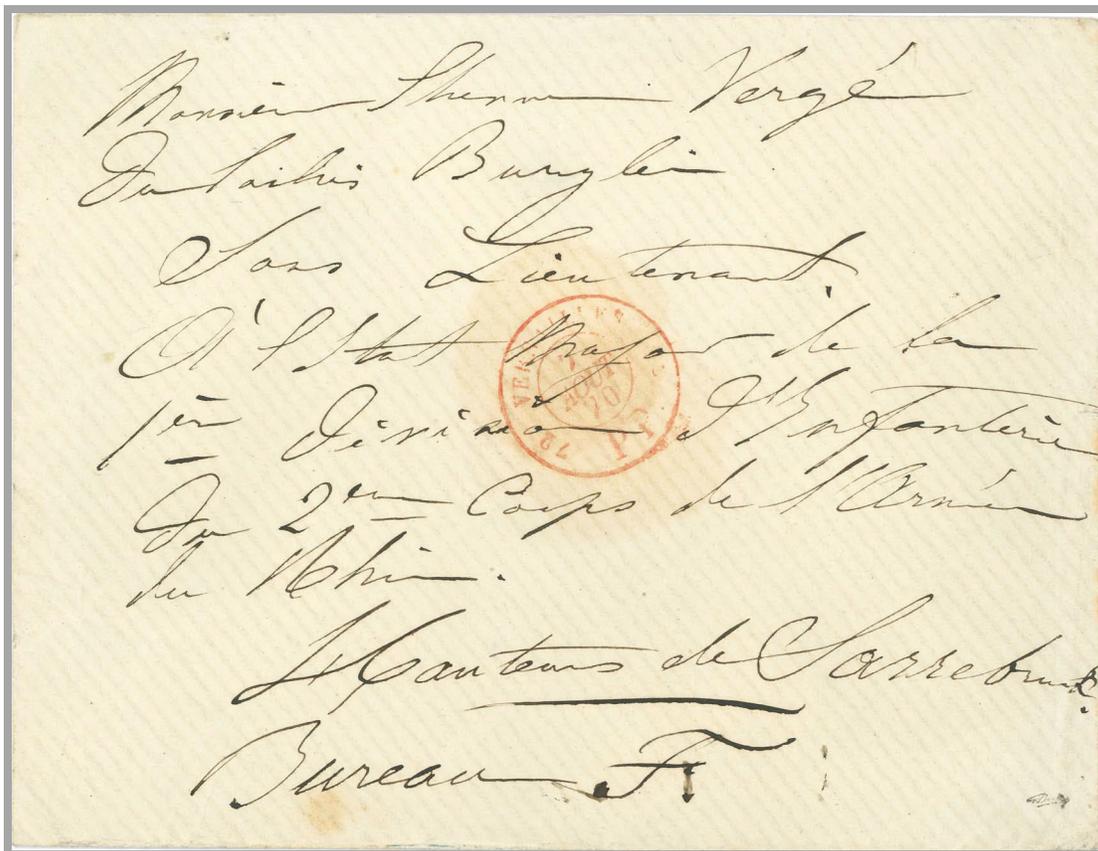
### French Occupation of Saarbrücken: August 2-5



The French 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps crossed the frontier on August 2 and captured Saarbrücken, but fell back to Spicheren on August 5.



Dated August 5 at Saarbrücken and posted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Division Bureau F



Posted August 7 in Versailles with military free frank by Princess Mathilde Bonaparte  
Addressed to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division on the "Hauteurs de Sarrebruck Bureau F"

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

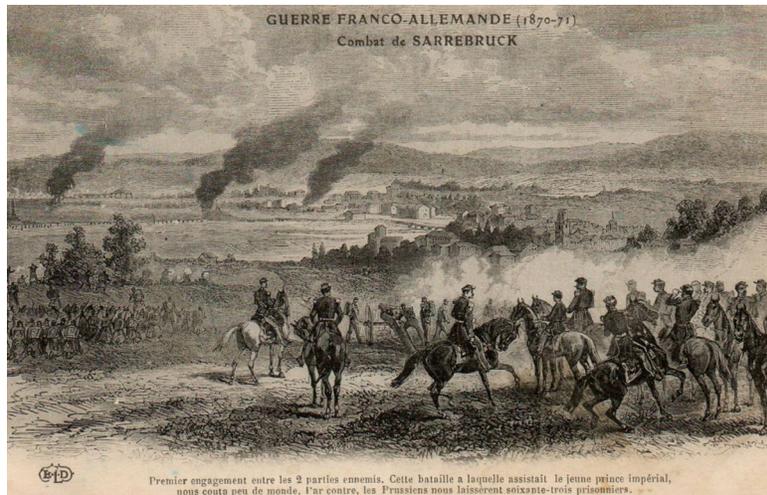
### French Occupation of Saarbrücken: August 2-5



Sixty-three Germans were captured at Saarbrücken. During the entire war, only four thousand were captured by the French, so German POW mail is very scarce.



Registered letter posted September 28 in Berlin – entered France via Douai on September 30  
Addressed to **Prussian police lieutenant captured at Saarbrücken** on August 2  
Prepaid 8½ groschen with North German Confederation stamps – 4gr. registration fee  
Received October 5 at Dax – forwarded six times - reached Vierzon on October 10



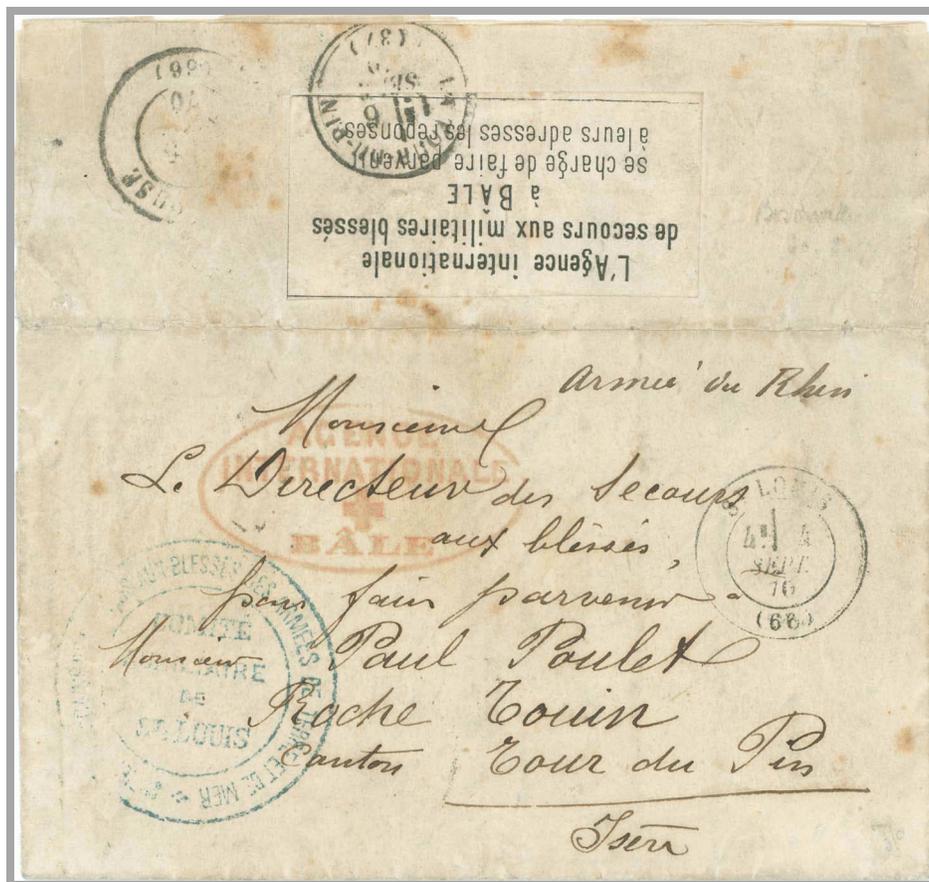
Print of the August 2 Combat at Saarbrücken

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### August 6 Frontier Battle at Wörth



The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bavarian Corps, 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, 11<sup>th</sup> Corps and Wurttemberg Division (German III Army) attacked the French 1<sup>st</sup> Corps and the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of 7<sup>th</sup> Corps. The French retreated southwest toward Nancy.



Written August 30 at Bischwiller by a wounded prisoner from the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps' 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment  
He wrote that, "C'est Samedi le 6 de ce mois que j'ai été blessée dans la bataille de Voerth"  
Handled by the Basel Red Cross at Basel - posted at nearby St. Louis on September 4  
Response sticker applied on reverse – tied by September 6 La Tour du Pin arrival postmark

**Fewer than five Bâle Response Stickers are known on cover**

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## August 6 Frontier Battle at Wörth



Written near Hagenau by a wounded prisoner from the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' 9<sup>th</sup> Cuirassiers  
Lt. de Villers was wounded and captured during a cavalry charge on August 6  
Handled by the Basel Red Cross - which used a **modified Geneve label** on the reverse  
Posted prepaid 30 centimes at Basel on August 10 - arrived August 11 in Versailles



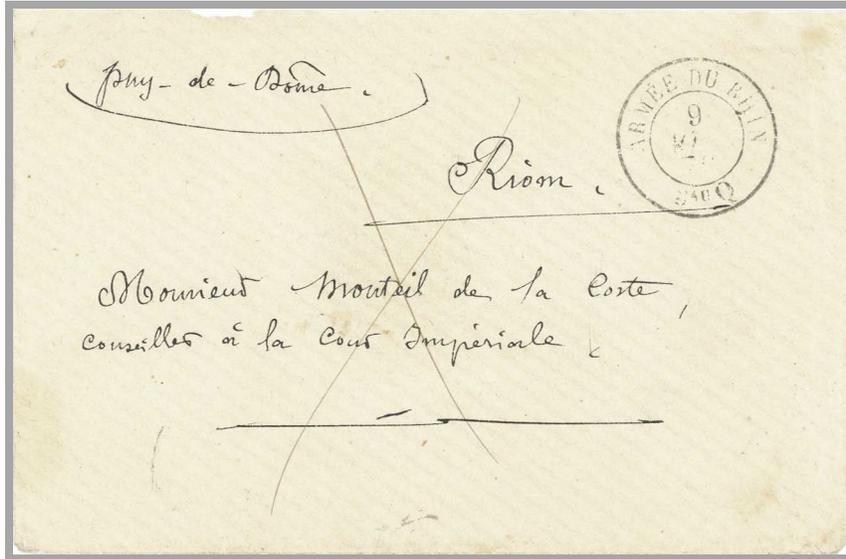
"Charge du 9<sup>e</sup> cuirassiers" by Edouard Detaille (1874)

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## August 6 Frontier Battle at Forbach



The German 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Corps attacked the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps on August 6 at Forbach and drove them west through St. Avold.



Dated August 7 at St. Avold and posted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps' 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Bureau Q on August 9

**Feldpost-Correspondenzkarte.**

K. PR. FELD-POST-AMT  
3.  
ARMEE-CPS.  
10 8

**An**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Herr Hauptmann Wiegand Sönnichsen  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Ab-Müller  
 Sönnichsen →

**Bestimmungsort:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Berlin

Wohnung des Empfängers, wenn sie mit Sicherheit angegeben werden kann. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grotzschke

1) Der obige Vordruck für die Adresse ist deutlich und vollständig auszufüllen.  
 2) Die Rückseite des Formulars kann in ihrer ganzen Ausdehnung zu brieflichen Mitteilungen jeder Art benutzt werden, welche, sowie die Adresse, mit Tinte, Bleifeder oder farbigem Stifte geschrieben sein können.  
 3) In den Correspondenzkarten, welche an die mobilen Truppen und Militärbeamten abgefaßt werden, muß deutlich angegeben sein: zu welchem Armeecorps, welcher Division, welchem Regimente, welcher Compagnie (oder sonstigem Truppenteile) der Adressat gehört, welchen Grad und Character oder welches Amt bei der Militärverwaltung derselbe bekleidet.

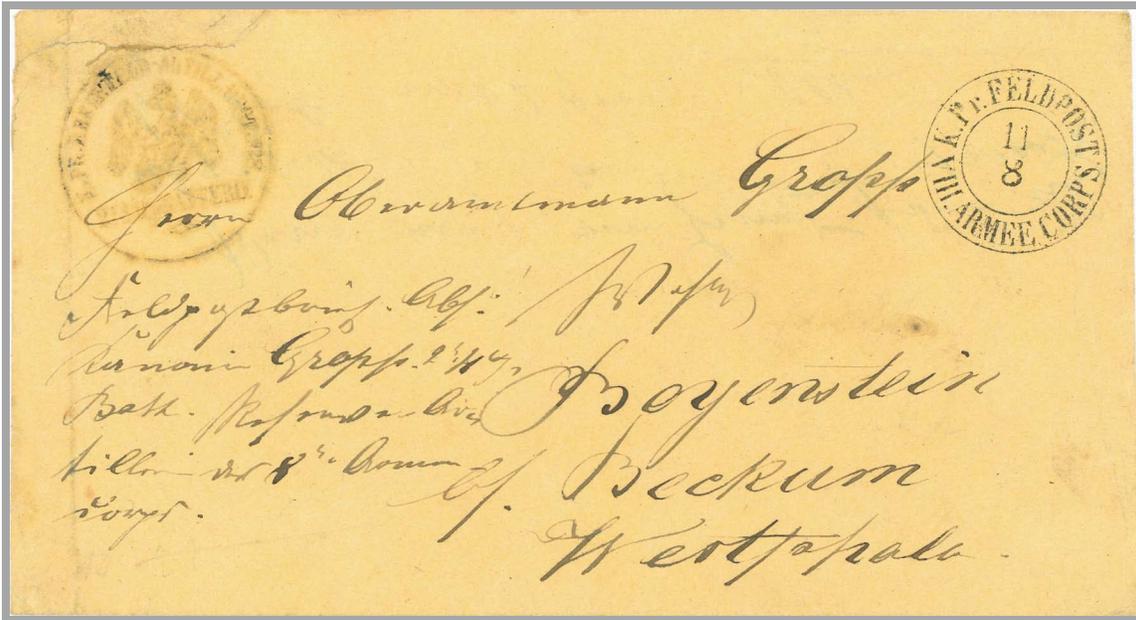
Dated August 9 at St. Avold – posted August 10 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps headquarters bureau

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## German Advance on Metz: August 7-13



After the August 6 victory at Forbach, the German I and II Armies advanced west to encircle the French army in Metz.



Posted August 11 at the 8th Corps HQ bureau – from the 8th Field Artillery of the I Army  
Old-style 1866 fieldpost postmark – arrived in Beckum on August 15



Posted August 13 at the 6th Cavalry Division bureau – arrived August 19 in Berlin  
3rd Corps (II Army) commanding general added his sticker to the front

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### German Advance on Metz: August 7-18



The III Army advanced southwest after the August 6 victory at Wörth to approach the siege of Metz from the south. Headquarters were established at Nancy.



Dated August 18 in occupied Nancy – postmarked at III Army HQ bureau  
Sent by civilian to unoccupied France – III Army was the only post in operation  
Franked 20c in French postage – censored on reverse by III Army HQ staff  
Routed via Prussia and Mulhouse to St. Loup on September 1



Scan of reverse at 90% - German fieldpost cancels on French stamps are rare

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Siege of Strasbourg: August 11 – September 27



After its August 6 victory at Wörth, the III Army detached the Baden Division to capture Strasbourg. The siege began on August 11, and was reinforced by the Garde Landwehr and 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Divisions on August 29. After a 45-day bombardment, the city surrendered on September 27.



Dated September 5 north of Strasbourg and posted at the Garde Landwehr Division bureau  
From the 2<sup>nd</sup> Garde-Landwehr Regiment – arrived September 8 in Achern



Strasbourg in ruins after the bombardment

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Strasbourg: August 11 – September 27



Strasbourg had 17,000 men to defend the fortress. The kernel was the 87<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment, four mobilization depots and about 50 naval marines. There was no fieldpost service in the besieged city.



Postmarked August 9 at the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps headquarters bureau at Mulhouse  
Unnecessarily prepaid by an 1863 Issue 20c stamp – **only known 'AR7<sup>e</sup>C' cancel**  
From General Douay, commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps, to his wife at Strasbourg



(Scan of the reverse at 90%)

Arrived August 10 in Strasbourg, but Mme Douay had left so it was held  
Postmarked again in Strasbourg on August 11 and trapped by the German siege  
Finally forwarded after the siege to Besançon on October 8

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

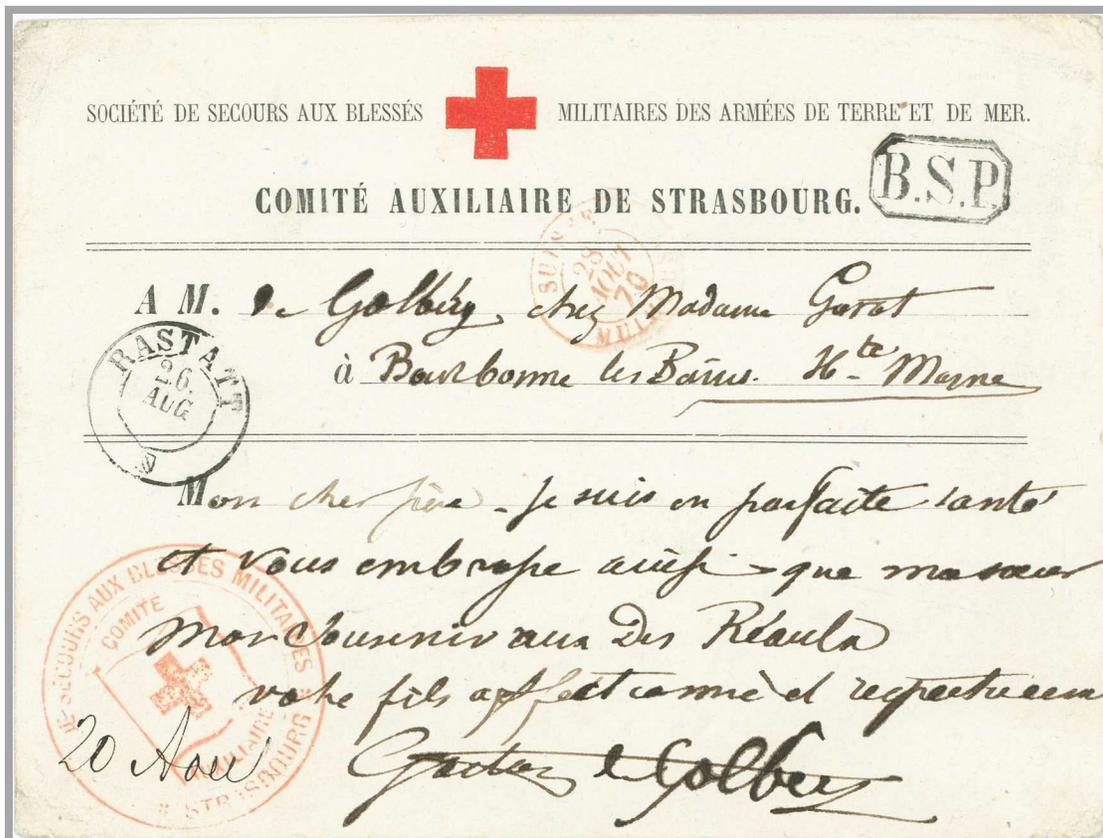
## Siege of Strasbourg: August 11 – September 27



The Red Cross assisted the population during the bombardment, and carried out the only known line-crosser letters or postcards.



Dated September 11 in Strasbourg by naval officer – **confided to visiting Swiss delegation**  
Posted September 17 in Berne – arrived September 25 in Vendôme with 5 décimes due



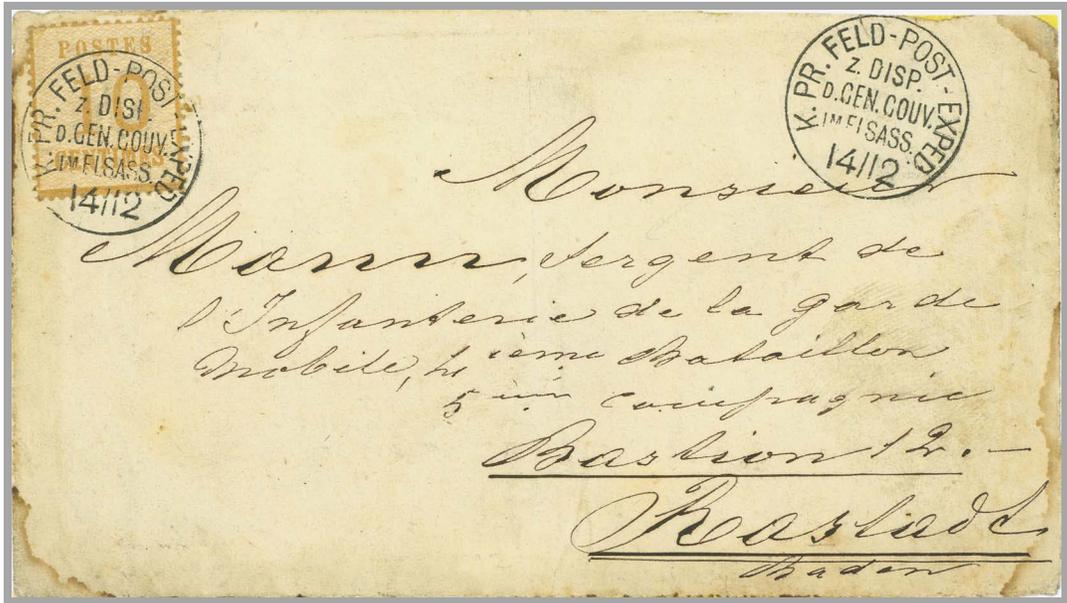
Red Cross card datelined August 20 and posted August 26 in Rastatt – marked free per “B.S.P.”

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Occupation of Strasbourg: September 27 – March 7



The 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Division occupied Strasbourg after the siege under the command of the Governor-General of Alsace.



Posted December 14 at “Gen. Gouv. im Elsass” bureau in Strasbourg – paid 10c to POW at Rastatt



Posted October 15 at 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Division bureau in occupied Strasbourg – arrived October 18

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### French Retreat to Metz: August 7-13



The Garde Impériale and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Corps retreated to the fortified city of Metz. Napoléon III was in command there from July 28 to August 16.



Dated August 10 at the HQ in Metz and postmarked at the "Bureau Spécial de l'Empereur"  
**Only known example from this bureau in this war** – in operation for only 37 days



Registered letter postmarked August 13 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division's Bureau AK in Metz  
Required 60c prepayment – 40c registration and 20c postage – 'ARAK' cancels  
Virtually all letters received a free frank – **Armée du Rhin cancels are very rare**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### August 14 Battle of Borny



The German 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Corps of the I Army and the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps of the II Army attacked the French 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Corps, and a portion of the Garde Impériale, east of Metz. The French retreated into Metz.



Dated August 14 and posted two days later at the Garde Impériale 2<sup>nd</sup> Division bureau  
From the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grenadier Regiment – arrived August 21 in Sallanches



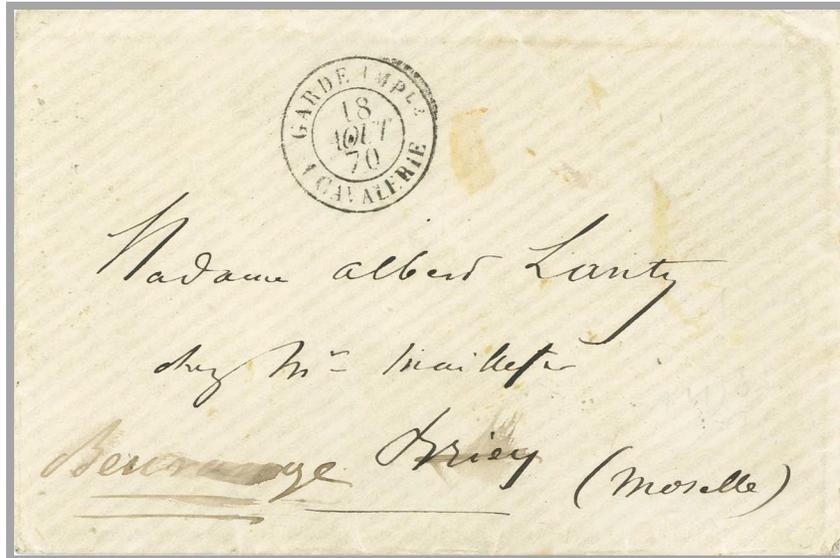
Dated October 18 at Montoy – reported the **death of a 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment soldier on August 14**  
Postmarked on October 19 at the 13<sup>th</sup> Division (7<sup>th</sup> Corps) bureau – **addressed to the USA**  
Routed via Prussia and England to New York on November 8 – 22 cents due in Boston

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## August 16 Battle of Vionville



The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Corps of the German II Army attacked the entire French army west of Metz. The French held the ground, but fell back on Metz.



Dated August 17 – posted next day at the Garde Impériale Cavalry bureau – arrived June 6

**Feldpost - Correspondenzkarte.**

4. Garde-Grenadier-Regiment **Königin**

An

*Lina von Lantzy Schlink*  
*Poppenhausen*

Bestimmungsort: *Abreschen*  
*Rogly Coblerer*

Wohnung des Empfängers, wenn sie mit Sicherheit angegeben werden kann.

1) Der obige Vordruck für die Adresse ist deutlich und vollständig auszufüllen.  
2) Die Rückseite des Formulars kann in ihrer ganzen Ausdehnung zu brieflichen Mitteilungen jeder Art benutzt werden, welche, sowie die Adresse, mit Tinte, Bleifeder oder farbigem Stifte geschrieben sein können.  
3) In den Correspondenzarten, welche an die mobilen Truppen und Militärbeamten abgefaßt werden, muß deutlich angegeben sein: zu welchem Armeekorps, welcher Division, welchem Regimente, welcher Compagnie (oder sonstigem Truppenteile) der Adressat gehört, welchen Grad und Charakter oder welches Amt bei der Militärverwaltung derselbe bekleidet.

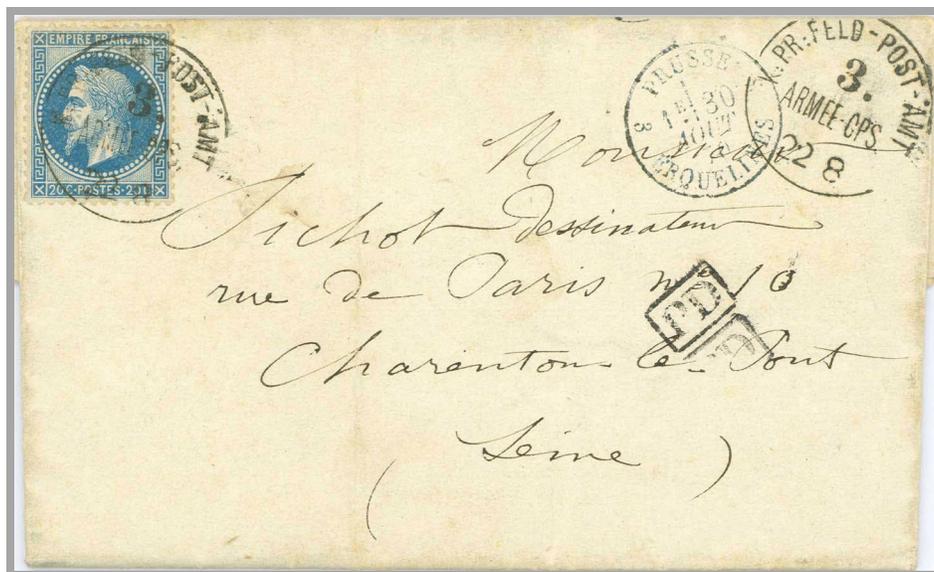
Dated August 16 and postmarked at the Garde-Corps Cavalry bureau

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### August 16 Battle of Vionville



The German 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps overran the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps at Vionville. The Germans held the battlefield after the fight.



Dated August 21 on the Vionville battlefield by a wounded French prisoner  
Franked 20c French postage – postmarked August 22 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps bureau  
“I could not be evacuated to Metz...We are 200 or 300 wounded with the Prussians”  
Routed via Prussia to northern France – arrived near Paris on August 30



Metz battle scene by Alphonse de Neuville (1881)

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

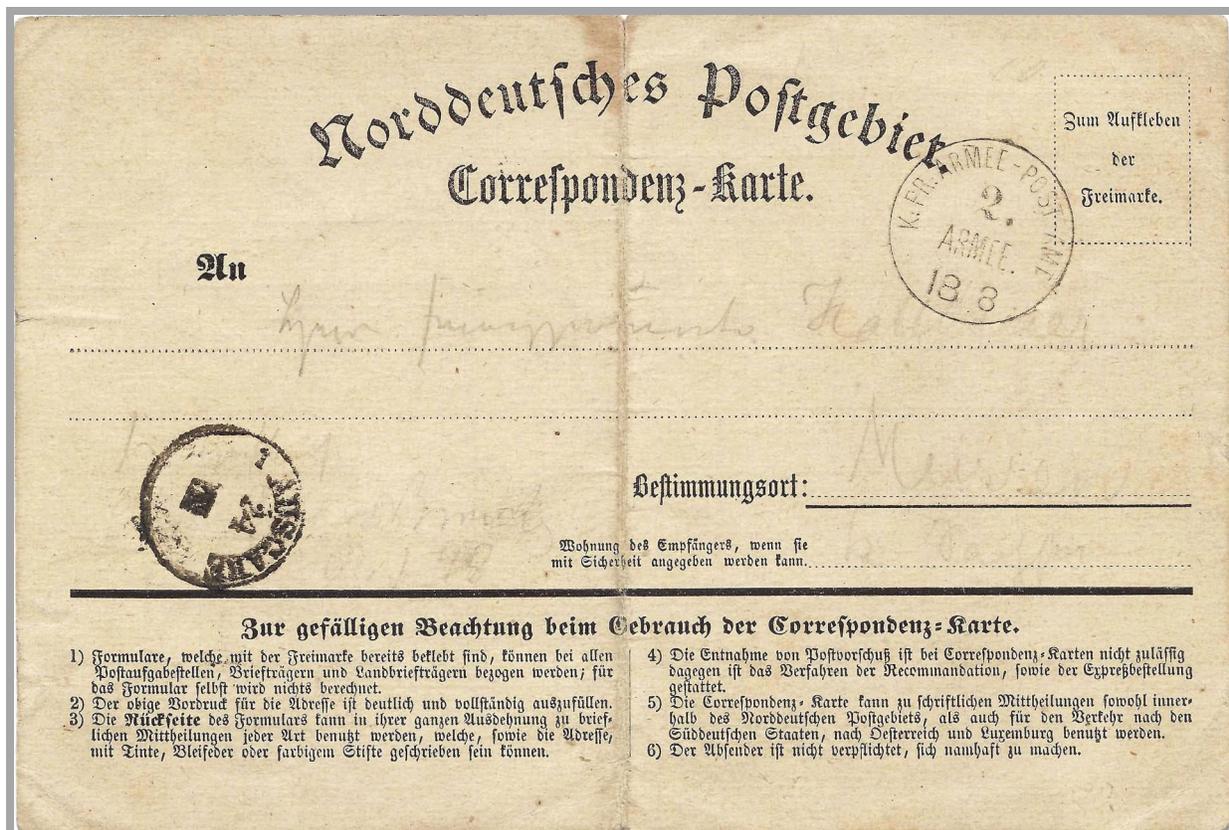
## August 18 Battle of St. Privat



The German 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and Garde Corps of the II Army, and the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Corps of the I Army attacked the entire French army. The French collapsed on the right, and retreated back into Metz



Dated August 18 and posted at the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ bureau – arrived June 3, 1871



Dated "Near Metz" and posted August 18 at the II Army HQ bureau – arrived August 24

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## German Siege of Metz: August 19 – October 27



After the August 18 Battle of St. Privat, the German I and II Armies besieged Metz until its surrender on October 27.



Unusual red October 7 I Army HQ bureau postmark – blue I Army commander marking 1 décime **due on October 11 in Belgium** – forwarded to Le Mans with 3 décimes due



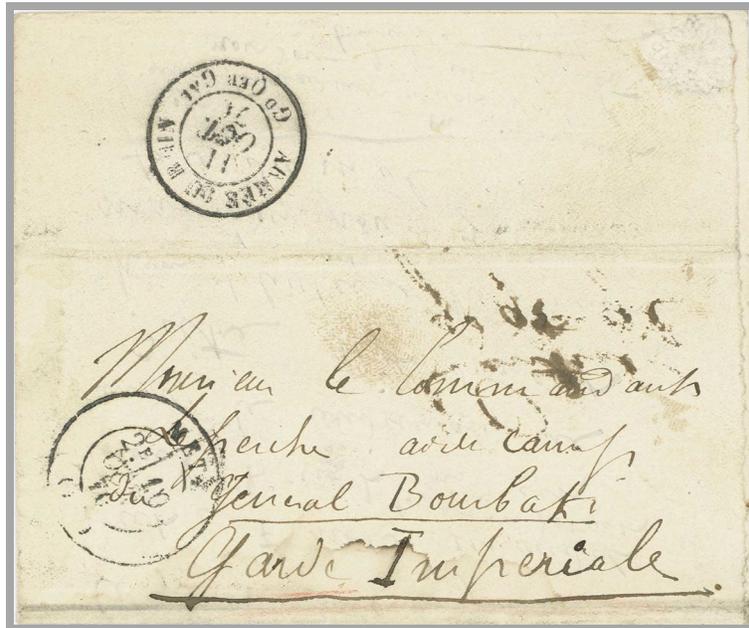
Postmarked September 3 at the Hessian 25<sup>th</sup> Division (II Army) bureau  
Required 9 kreuzer postage paid by **2kr and 7kr North German Confederation stamps**  
**Arrived on September 8 in Leeds, England** – red “P.D.” paid marking

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### French Defense of Metz: August 19 – October 27



The French Garde Impériale and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Corps were trapped in Metz until their surrender on October 27.



Posted with free frank on October 10 in Metz – addressed to Général Bourbaki aide-de-camp  
Received October 11 at Grand Headquarters bureau – **only known example of this postmark**



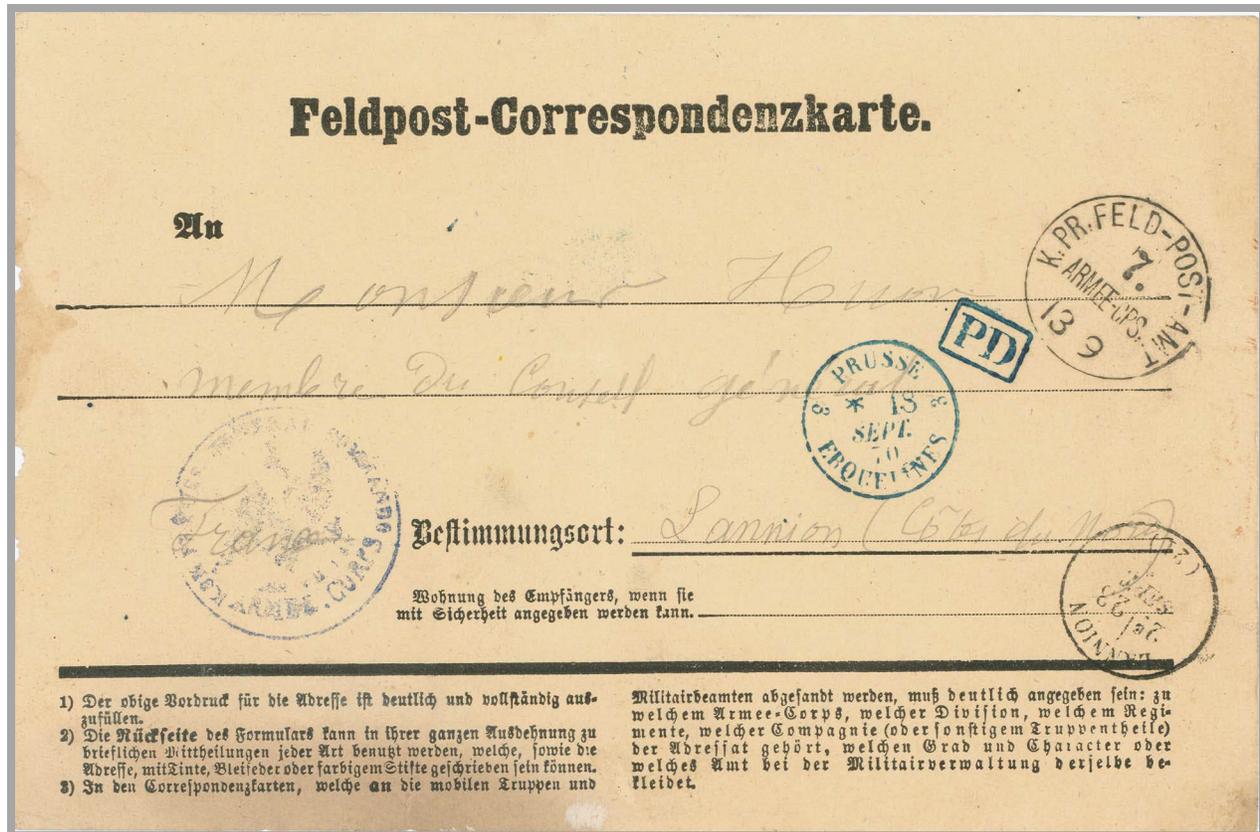
Postmarked October 16 at the postal “Bureau Central” – **franked 20c French postage**  
From a cavalry officer in the 11<sup>th</sup> Dragoons of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps – arrived April 27, 1871 in Givet

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### August 31 – September 1 Battle of Noisseville



The French 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Corps attempted a breakout against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Landwehr Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps and part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps. German reinforcements from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Corps pushed the French back into Metz on September 1.



Dated September 11 at Remilly by a 4<sup>th</sup> Corps artillery captain **captured at Noisseville**  
Postmarked September 13 at the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps bureau outside of Metz – blue 7<sup>th</sup> Corps censor mark  
Routed via Prussia to Paris on September 18 per blue entry mark – **trapped in the Paris siege**  
**Carried out of Paris siege by postman Létoile on September 20** – arrived September 23



“Surprise Attack in Metz” by Alphonse de Neuville

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 5-15



The first Metz balloon service was created by military pharmacists on September 5 and lasted ten days. They launched 14 unmanned balloons, of which eight were captured. Only 25 letters are known.



Dated September 7 in Metz - **5<sup>th</sup> Pharmacists' balloon** left September 10 with 40 letters  
Mail was recovered near Lille and processed there on September 19 – no Paris arrival mark  
**This is the only letter known from this balloon**



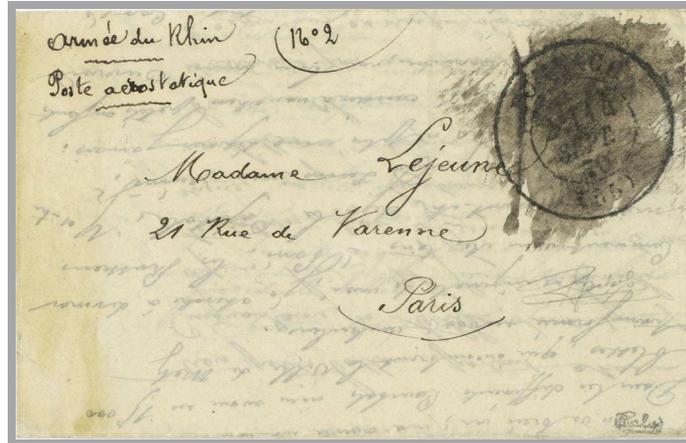
**Print of a Papillon de Metz**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

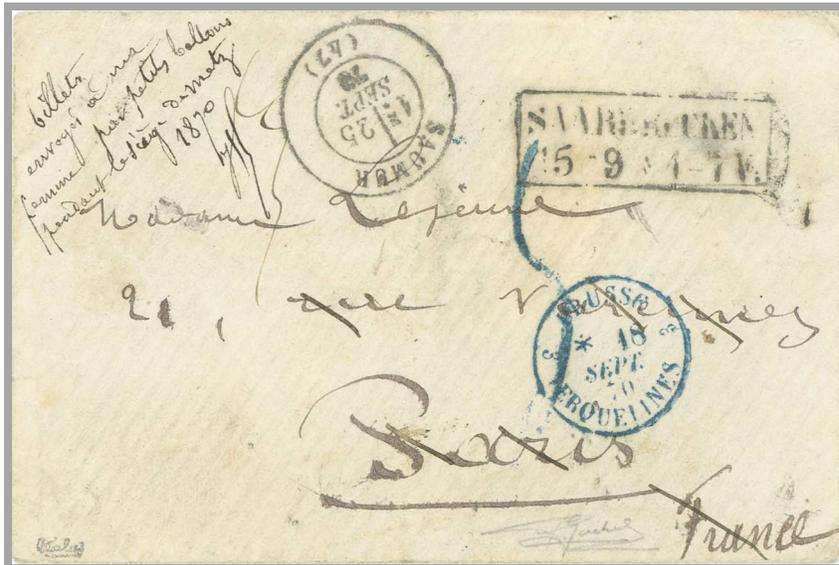
### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 5-15



Some recovered letters, or “papillons,” were forwarded inside of another envelope, or “envelope de réexpédition.” Fewer than 15 from the pharmacists’ service are known.



Dated September 8 in Metz - **6<sup>th</sup> Pharmacists’ balloon** left September 11 with 50 letters  
**Postmarked September 14 in occupied Forbach** – then defaced to conceal French origin

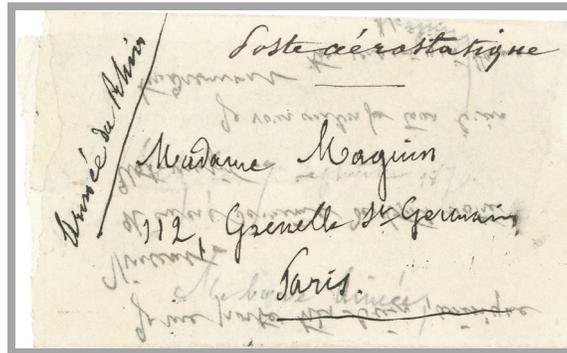


Placed in above envelope and posted unpaid on September 15 in nearby Saarbrücken, Prussia  
Routed via Prussia to Paris on September 18 per blue entry mark – **caught in the Paris siege**  
**Carried out of siege by postmen Brare and Gême on September 21** – arrived September 23

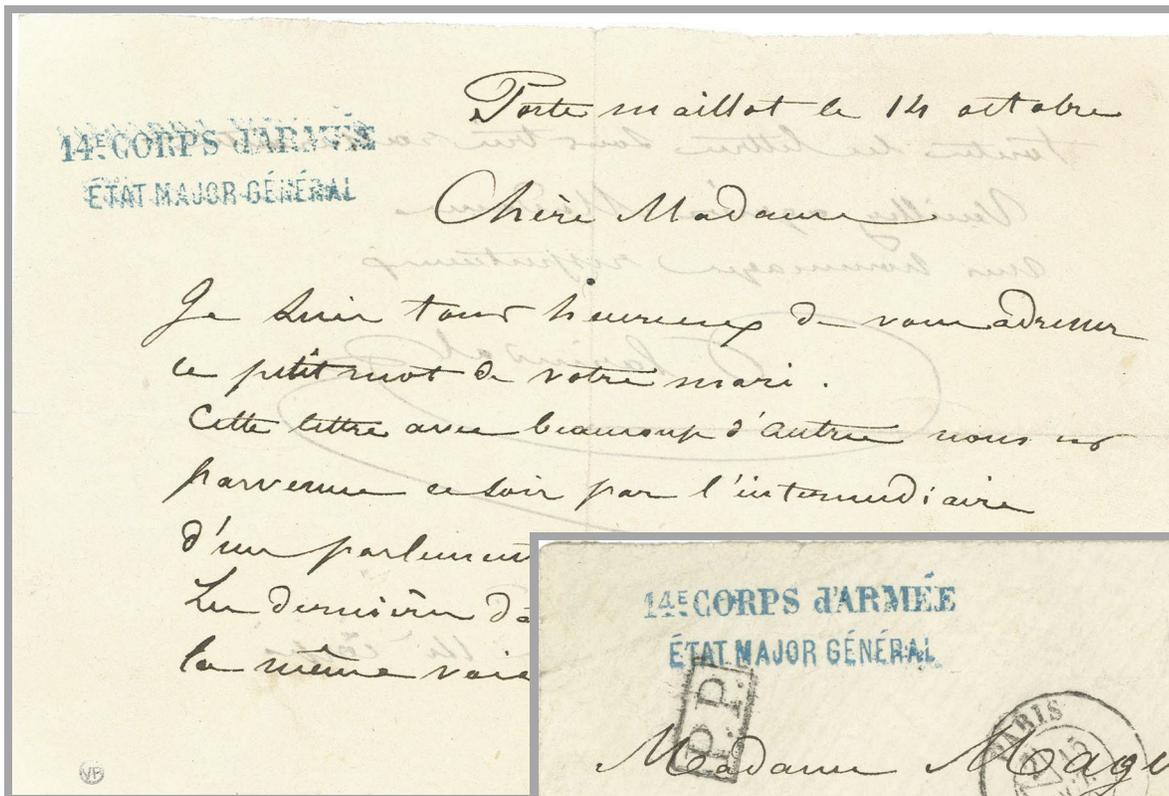
**Escaped from two different sieges**

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 5-15



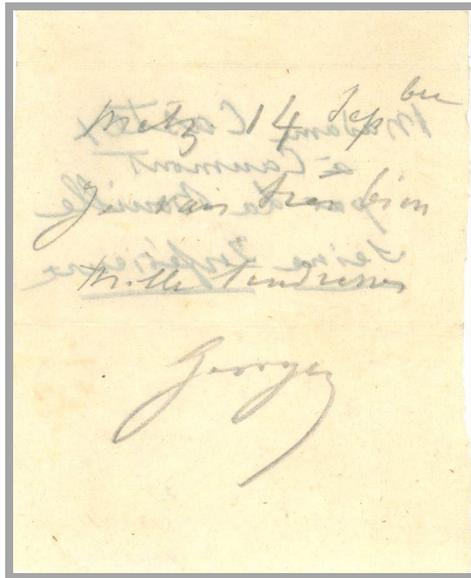
Dated September 7 in Metz - **7<sup>th</sup> Pharmacists' balloon** left September 11 with 63 letters  
Captured on landing in Germany and forwarded to German headquarters at Versailles  
**Carried under flag-of-truce into besieged Paris on October 14 by U.S. diplomatic courier**



Given to 14<sup>th</sup> Corps officer - posted October 15 in Paris with a note in the above envelope

**Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine**

**Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 5-15**



Dated September 14 in Metz - **14<sup>th</sup> Pharmacists' balloon** left September 15 with 130 letters



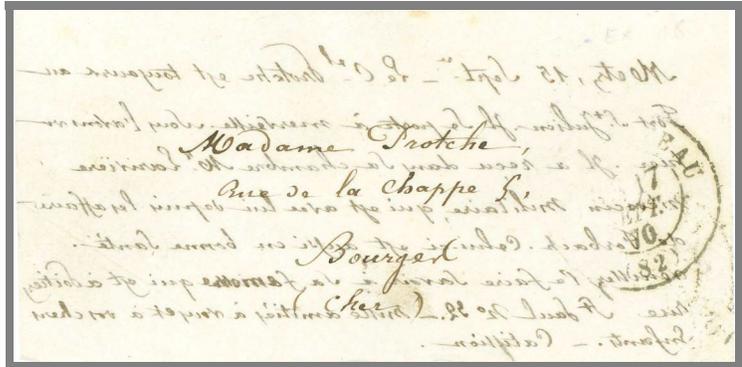
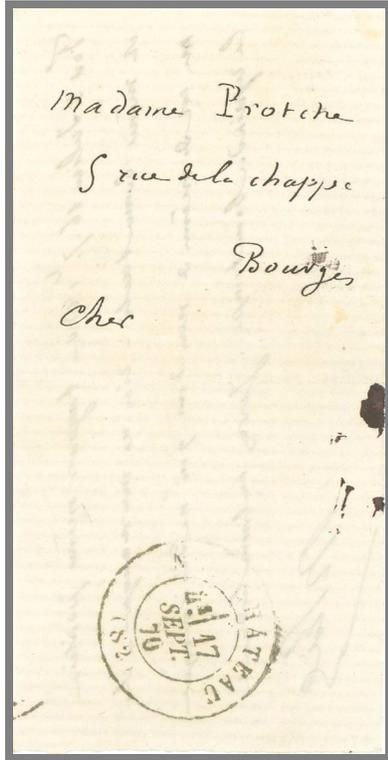
Carried to Marseille – posted September 19 in above postal envelope – arrived September 23

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 16 - October 3



The second Metz balloon service was operated by military engineers. Their first balloon left September 16 and was recovered safely near Neufchâteau. Maréchal Bazaine ended the service on October 3.



Dated September 16 from Lt-Colonel Protche (left)

Dated September 15 at Metz from Protche aide (above)

**Received September 17 Neufchâteau transit marks**

**Both papillons enclosed in envelope (below) at Bourges**



Papillons placed in above "Cabinet du Préfet du Cher" envelope for delivery in Bourges  
Prepaid 20 centimes on September 21 for forwarding from Bourges to Libourne

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

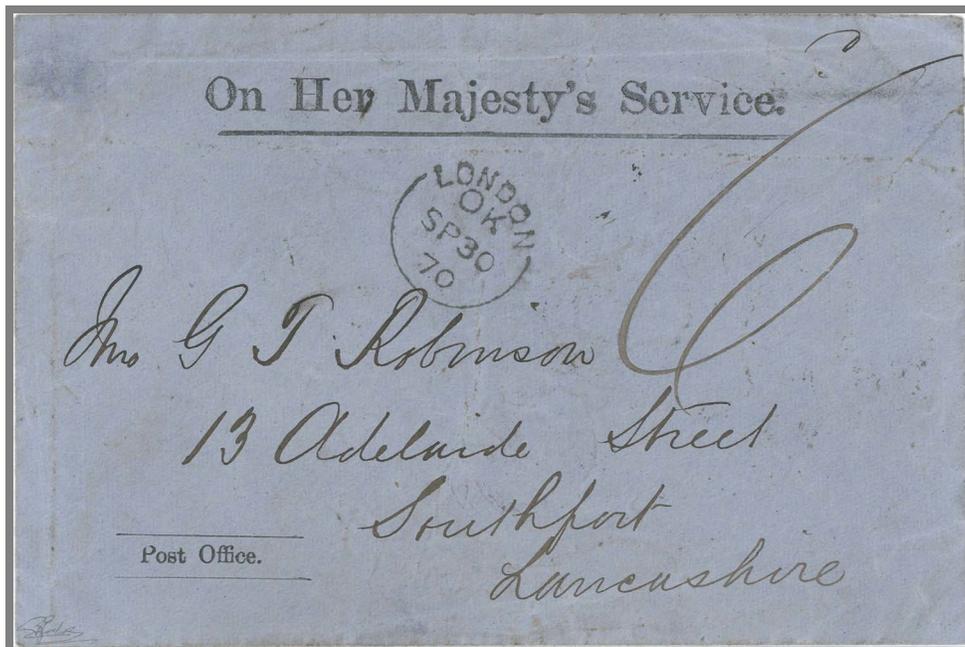
### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 16 - October 3



The 4<sup>th</sup> Engineers' balloon landed safely near Fresnes-en-Voëvre on September 21 with 30,000 papillons. Some mail was processed at Fresnes; most was processed at Tours.



Dated September 21 in Metz - September 22 Fresnes-en-Voëvre transit postmark  
From George Robinson, co-inventor of the balloon service - forwarded unpaid to England  
**Only two papillons are known with September 22 Fresnes postmarks**



Papillon placed in above British Post Office envelope - arrived September 30 with 6d due

'MUSLIN' UNDERLAY  
OF A THICKNESS OF  
180 MICRONS

### SIEGE OF METZ

#### A ROBINSON ENGINEERS BALLOON

Robinson wrote in pencil a few messages on the inside of a balloon's fabric. These were forwarded to his wife in England under cover of an official French postal envelope.

This balloon was launched on 20th. September.



PAPER GLUED  
ON 'MUSLIN'  
110 MICRONS



*Ministère des Finances  
Directeur Général des Fin.*

Madame Robinson Adelaide

31 Southport

Lancashire

Angleterre

P.D.

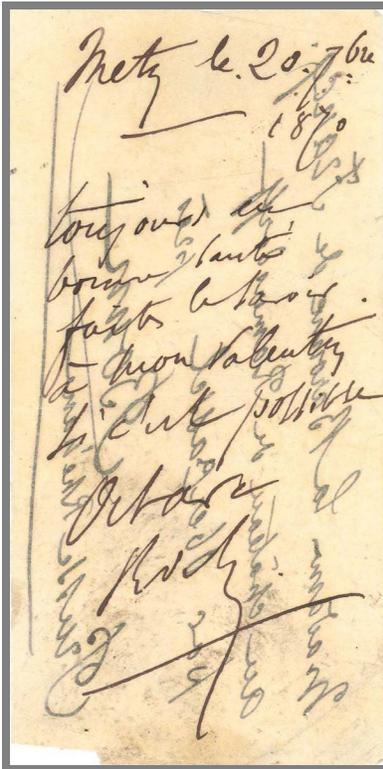
TOURNAI  
1870

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 16 - October 3



Fewer than 20 papillons addressed to foreign destinations are known. Half of those were sent to Belgium or England.



Dated September 20 in Metz - 4<sup>th</sup> Engineers' balloon left September 21 with 25,000 letters  
Addressed to Ober Cassel, Prussia - placed in envelope below for forwarding  
**Only two papillons are known addressed to Prussia**



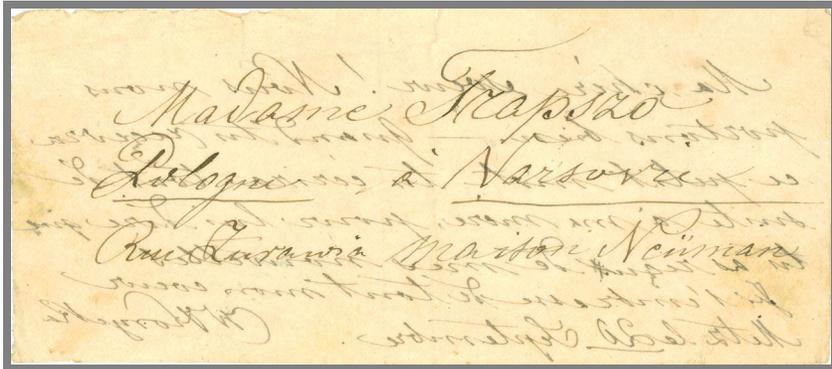
*Papillon* placed in envelope and posted October 2 in Dijon - arrived October 7  
Rated for military free frank in France, but charged 4 groschen due in Prussia

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 16 – October 3



Dijon was designated as the exchange office for mail to the German States and Central Europe. The few papillons to those destinations were placed in forwarding envelopes at Dijon.



Dated "Metz le 20 Septembre" - 4<sup>th</sup> Engineers' balloon left September 21  
**Only three papillons are known addressed to Poland**



Papillon was placed in above forwarding envelope - posted unpaid on October 3 in Dijon  
France debited Prussia per F.42 tray marking - Prussia debited Poland 6 silbergroschen  
Arrived in Warsaw, Poland on October 9 with 32 kopecks due

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

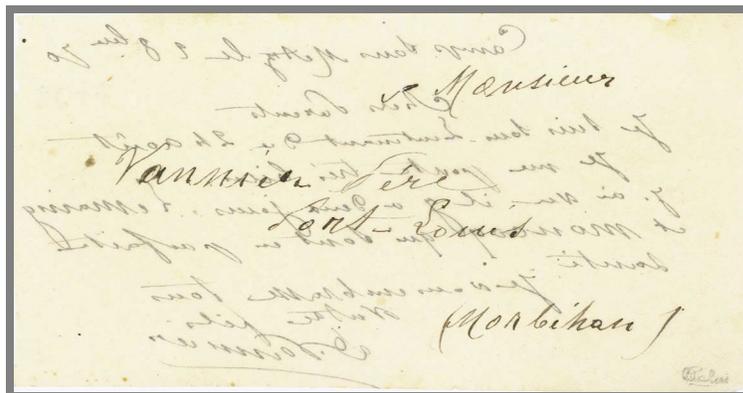
### Siege of Metz Balloon Service: September 16 – October 3



After six of the eleven Engineers' balloons were captured, the service was suspended by Maréchal Bazaine on October 4 for security reasons.



Dated September 26 in Metz by George Robinson - **8<sup>th</sup> Engineers' balloon** left September 27  
Landed safely near Bayonville with about 16,000 papillons - mail processed October 4 at Lille  
Marked "F.S.P." for free frank in France, but rated 6 pence due in England on October 5



Dated "Camp sous Metz le 28bre 70" - **11<sup>th</sup> and last Engineers' balloon** left October 3  
Balloon and 12,000 papillons were captured and confiscated by the Prussians

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

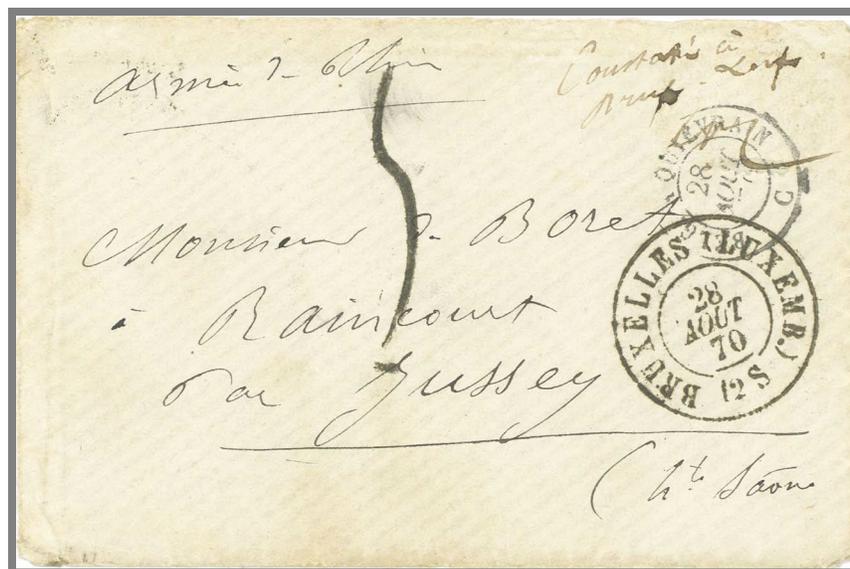
### Siege of Metz Line-Crossers: August 19 - October 27



Very few line-crossers were successful in passing the strong German siege lines. Those who succeeded generally went north through occupied territory to the Belgian frontier.



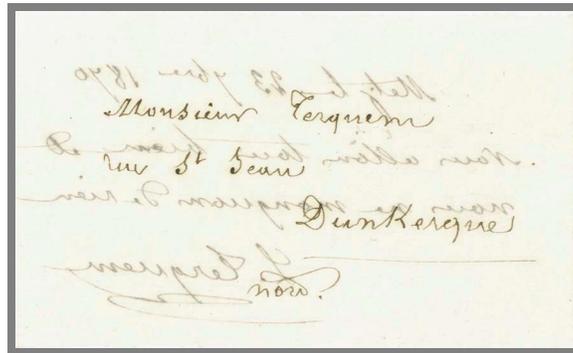
Dated September 26 at Metz by Lt.-Colonel de Narp - arrived October 3 in Douai  
**Flag-of-truce** to Prussian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commander - granted free frank on September 30



Dated August 20 at Metz by Colonel of 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment - given to **line-crosser via Belgium**  
Posted unpaid on August 28 in Brussels - arrived August 31 in Jussey with 50c postage due

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Siege of Metz Line-Crossers: August 19 - October 27



Dated September 23 at Metz - intended for 6<sup>th</sup> Engineers' balloon which left September 24  
Placed instead inside of franked envelope below and given to a line-crosser via Belgium



(scan of reverse)

9<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Prussian 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps at Verdun **captured the line-crosser enroute to Belgium**  
Sent to Frankfurt for censoring - posted there on October 3 without postage due  
**German postmarks are rare on French stamps**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Surrender of Metz: October 27



Metz surrendered on October 27 and the French army began leaving for captivity two days later. This French disaster released 150,000 German soldiers for service elsewhere in France.



Dated October 31 at the French headquarters in Metz by a Garde Mobile officer  
"I leave for the first stage of captivity tomorrow morning the 1<sup>st</sup> of November"  
Posted prepaid 2 groschen at the newly-opened Metz post office on October 31  
Routed via Prussia and Douai to Magnac-Bourg on November 8



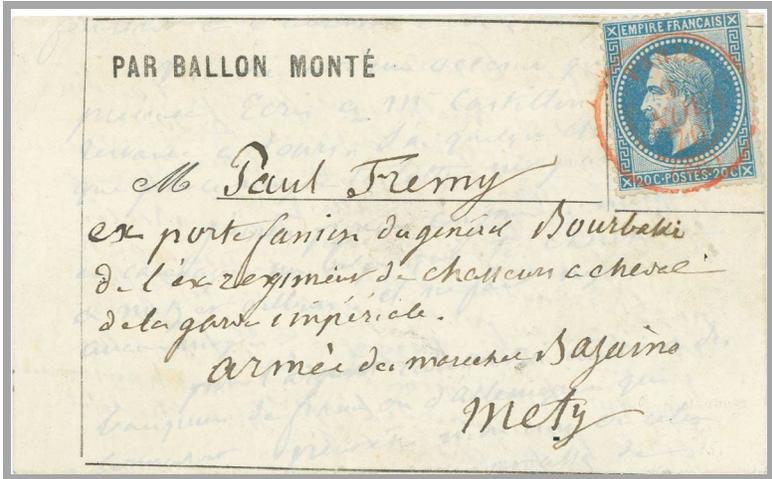
**Surrender of the Armée de Metz**

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Surrender of Metz: October 27



The French military free frank caused some confusion about rates to French POWs in Germany. Fully paid rates were 30c, 40c or 50c, depending on the destination.



Posted November 6 (inverted '6' in postmark) at the Paris (SC) bureau  
 Prepaid 20c balloon mail rate – left Paris November 8 on the “Gironde”  
 Addressed to captured Garde Impériale cavalryman at Metz – no arrival marks



Posted December 10 in Paris – left December 11 aboard the balloon “Général Renault”  
 Prepaid 20c balloon mail rate – endorsed for German free frank per “Frei” endorsement  
 “F.S.P.” marking accepted 20c prepayment - addressed to captured 6<sup>th</sup> Corps Lt.-Colonel  
 Germans rejected “Frei” endorsement and charged 2½ groschen postage due

**Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine**  
**Surrender of Metz: October 27**



Prepaid 30c in Penne on January 18 – addressed to captured 81<sup>st</sup> Regiment (3<sup>rd</sup> Corps) officer  
 Routed via Basel Bahnhof (Switzerland) on January 23 – arrived January 24 in Mainz



Information request form from Geneva Red Cross – sent to captured 6<sup>th</sup> Corps soldier  
 Posted December 31 in Basel, Switzerland – free frank per blue “Portofrei” marking  
 Arrived January 3 in Posen, Prussia – returned on February 4 by the prisoner

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Neuf-Brisach: October 7 – November 10



The 4<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division was formed in Baden on September 20. It crossed the Rhine on October 2 and besieged Neuf-Brisach five days later. The Germans began a bombardment on October 7, and the city surrendered just over a month later.



Posted October 28 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division bureau outside of Neuf-Brisach  
From the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Ulanen Regiment – Arrived October 31 in Berlin



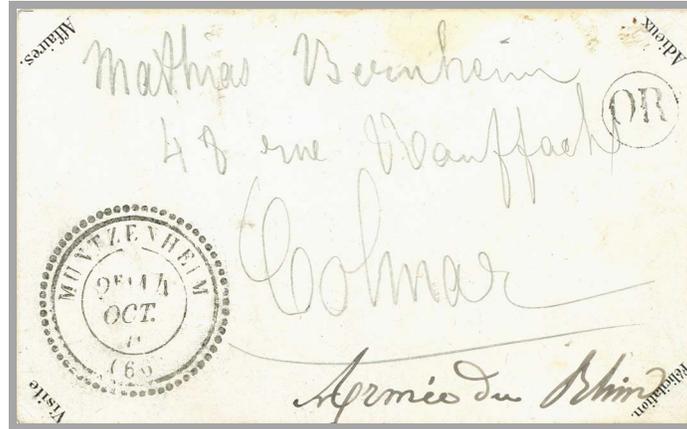
"Captured Dispatch Carrier" by Alphonse de Neuville (1880)

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Neuf-Brisach: October 7 - November 10



Line-crossers carried messages from besieged Neuf-Brisach to nearby towns for forwarding. Most of the few surviving messages are written on cut-down stiff cards.



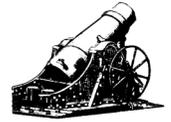
Carte-de-visite datelined October 12 in Neuf-Brisach – endorsed “Armée du Rhin”  
Posted October 14 at nearby Muntzenheim – **fewer than 15 cards are known**



Datelined “Neuf-Brisach ce 21 Octobre” by Lt. Robert of the Garde Mobile du Rhône  
Posted October 21 at nearby Mulhouse – arrived October 24 in Lyon

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

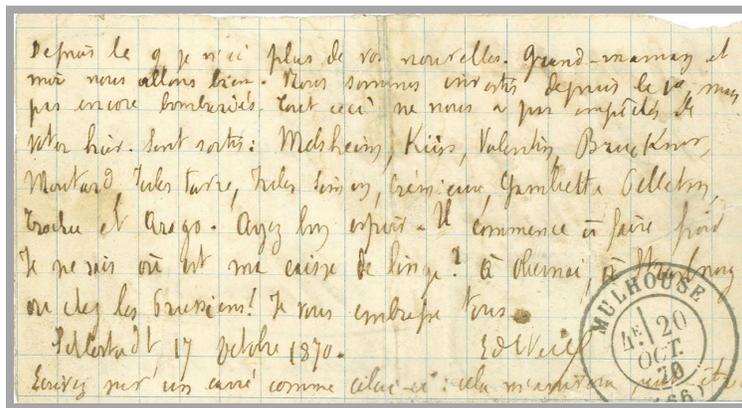
## Siege of Schlestadt: October 10-24



The East Prussia Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division began the siege on October 10. The German bombardment began on October 20 and the city surrendered four days later.



Postmarked October 17 in Schlestadt and prepaid 20c postage to Marseille October 20 Mulhouse transit – **only two letters are known from this siege**



Scan of reverse (90%)



German Siege Artillery

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

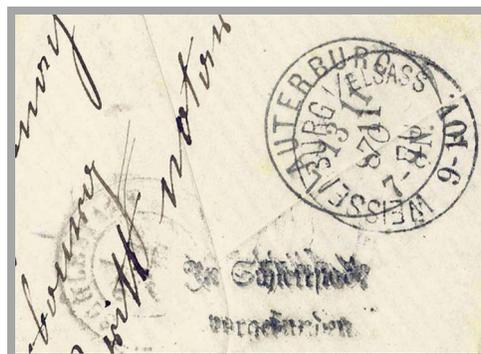
## Siege of Schlestadt: October 10-24



Mail blocked by the siege of Strasbourg was held in Schlestadt during its siege, but was released after the October 24 surrender. The German cachet "In Schlettstadt vorgefunden" (found at Schlestadt) was applied and the mail was finally delivered to Strasbourg on October 30.



Posted August 15 in St. Dié des Vosges and addressed to besieged Strasbourg  
Postmarked August 16 at Schlestadt - held there through the October 10-24 siege  
**Marked "In Schlettstadt vorgefunden"** and released to Strasbourg  
Forwarded to Lauterbourg on November 13 with 30c occupation postage due



Scan of reverse (110%)

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Belfort: November 4 – February 16



The October 27 surrender of Metz released the 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Division from Strasbourg for the siege of Belfort, which began on November 4. After holding out for three and a half months, Belfort capitulated on February 16, 1871.



Posted December 26 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Division bureau outside of Belfort  
From a siege artillery unit – arrived December 28 in Gerabronn, Württemberg



**"Entry of the Germans in Belfort" by Alphonse de Neuville (1881)**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Belfort: November 4 – February 16



The Germans maintained a tight siege. Even so, line-crossers via France or nearby Switzerland were able to pass through the lines regularly.



Dated December 12 at Belfort - posted at the Armée de l'Est fieldpost bureau  
From the secretary to the captain payeur for the Garde Mobile du Rhône in Belfort  
Received a military free frank per red 'P.P.' – arrived December 19 in Lyon



Posted with a free frank on November 4 in Belfort – arrived November 15  
From a Garde Mobile du Rhône using an Armée du Rhin envelope

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Belfort: November 4 – February 16



After the December 25-27 unsuccessful attempts, two unmanned balloons were released from Belfort on December 30. One was captured and the other was recovered in Switzerland on January 6.



Dated December 25 in Belfort – **“Je profite de l’essai d’un Ballon...”**  
Red ‘P.P.’ for a military free frank – arrived January 8 in Thizy



Posted on December 25 in Belfort by a civilian using the military balloon post  
Arrived January 10 in Angoulême with 30c postage due

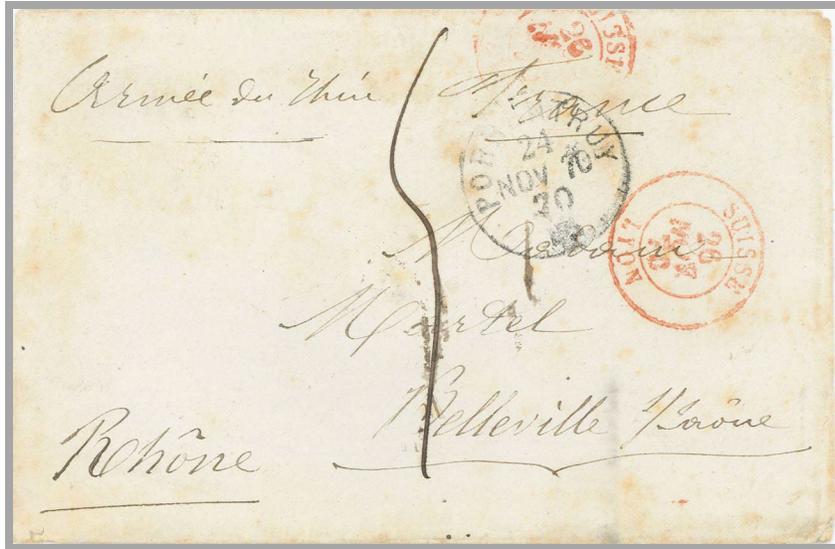
**Six letters are known from the Belfort balloon service; two have Belfort postmarks**

# Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

## Siege of Belfort: November 4 – February 16



Line-crossers carried mail across the lines to nearby French towns or to Porrentruy, Switzerland.



Dated November 22 in Belfort – carried to Porrentruy on November 24  
Arrived November 27 in Belleville with 50c due – unpaid rate from Switzerland



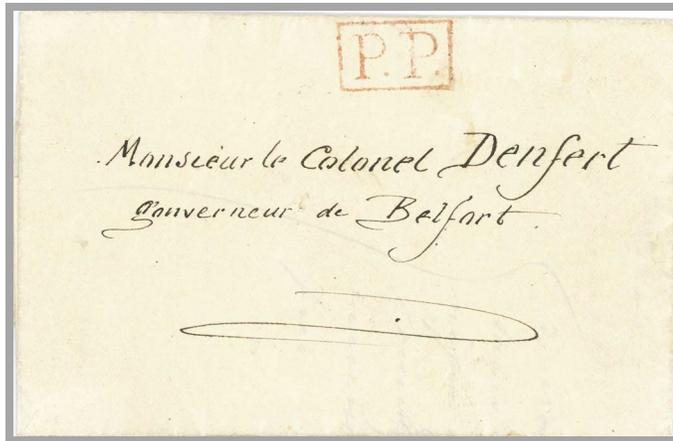
Dated November 22 in Belfort – line-crosser left mail at Hérimoncourt on November 28  
From Dr. Martel, surgeon at the Fort de la Miotte – **only known franked line-crosser letter**

## Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

### Siege of Belfort: November 4 – February 16

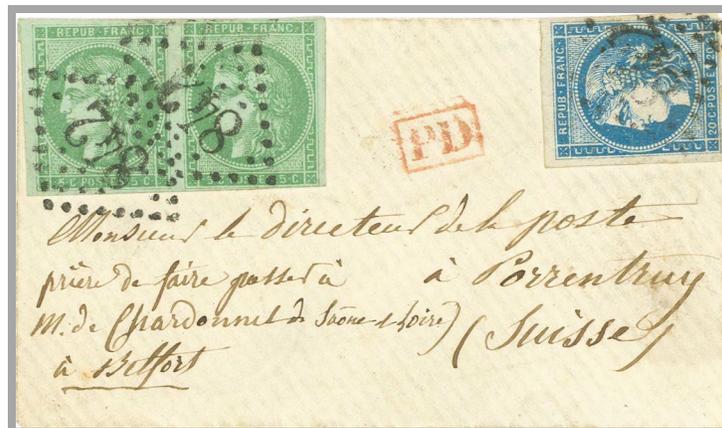


Incoming line-crosser mail followed the same routes as outgoing mail. Much less inbound mail is known.



Colonel Denfert

Dated December 1 in Mulhouse – military free frank per red 'P.P.'  
Military intelligence sent to **Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, commander at Belfort**



Prepaid 30c Swiss rate at Chalon-s-Saône – **addressed to Belfort via Porrentruy**  
January 17 Geneva transit postmark – docketed January 28 arrival in Belfort  
To Comte de Chardonnet with the Garde Mobile de la Haute Saône

# Campaign in the Ardennes

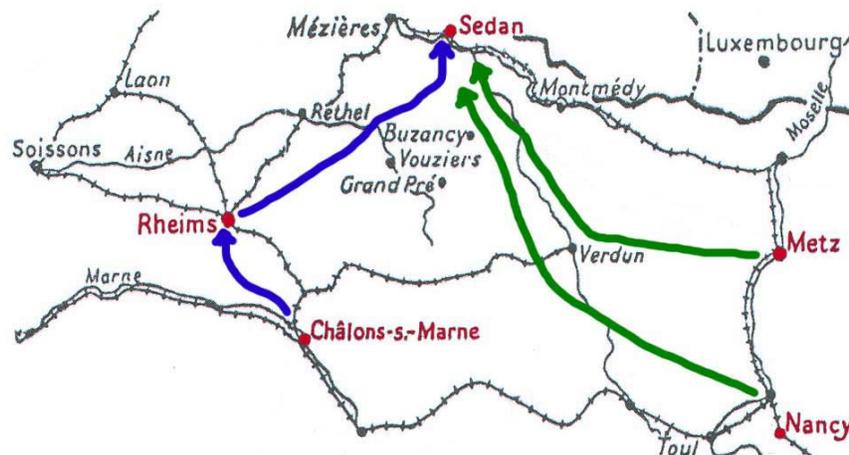
## Historical Summary: August 7 – September 1



- French Armée de Châlons (1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Corps) was assembled at Châlons-s-Marne August 7-21.
- German IV Army was formed on August 19 at Metz.
- Armée de Châlons moved to Reims on August 21.
- German III and IV Armies left Nancy and Metz on August 21.
- Armée de Chalons left Reims on August 23 for Montmédy.
- German III and IV Armies swung north on August 25.
- French 5<sup>th</sup> Corps was routed northeast of Buzancy on August 30, so the Armée de Châlons retreated to Sedan.
- Armée de Châlons surrendered on September 1 at Sedan.



Posted August 19 at a 7<sup>th</sup> Corps bureau in Châlons – arrived August 20 near Paris  
Unnecessary **20c franking cancelled 'P.P.'** – no fieldpost cancel was available



**Movements of the French (blue) and German (green) armies**

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### French Concentration at Châlons: August 7-21



The 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Corps retained their fieldpost materials. The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps lost theirs during the retreat from the frontier. The newly-formed 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Corps were not provided with fieldposts at Châlons.



Posted August 17 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' Cavalry Division Bureau E at Neufchâteau – arrived August 19  
The 1<sup>st</sup> Corps retreated from Wörth via Neufchâteau to Châlons on August 19



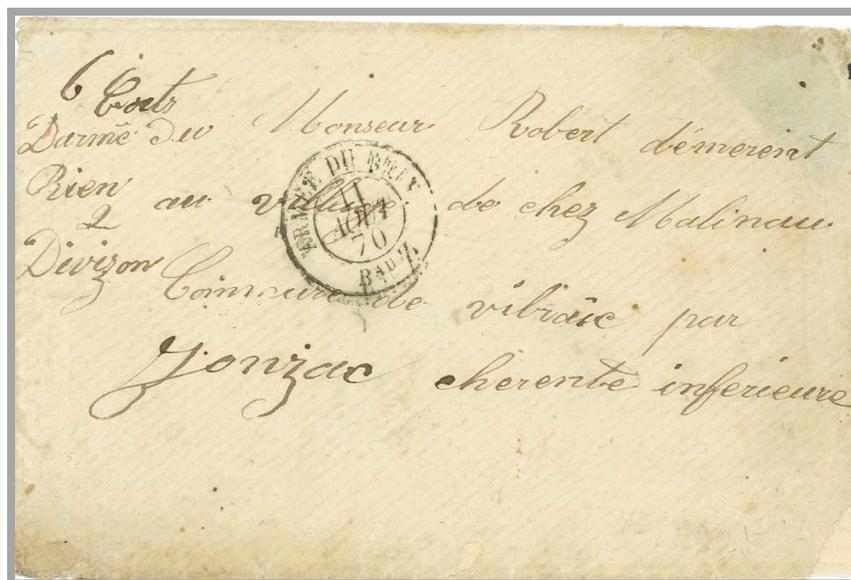
Posted August 20 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Bureau B at Châlons – **red postmark**  
Endorsed by Général Pellé, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division – sent locally

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### French Concentration at Châlons: August 7-21



Posted August 18 at the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ bureau enroute to Chaumont  
Private 7<sup>th</sup> Corps handstamp - arrived August 21 in Arametz



Dated August 10 at Châlons camp by a soldier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment  
Posted with military free frank on August 11 at the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps' 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Bureau Z  
2<sup>nd</sup> Division was unable to join the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps at Metz – became part of the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### French Concentration at Châlons: August 7-21



The 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, formed at Paris in August, was built around the 35<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiments, which had been called to Paris from occupation duty in Rome on August 3. They had their own fieldpost service in Rome.



Posted July 28 at the "Corps Expédre d'Italie Rome" bureau – arrived July 30  
The required 20c franking was cancelled 'CER' in red



Posted unpaid on July 26 at the "Corps Expédre Rome 2" bureau – arrived July 30  
Not eligible for the July 24 free frank – 30c postage due

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### French Concentration at Châlons: August 7-21



When the Rome garrison was called to active duty on August 3, it became eligible for the July 24 military free frank. Such mail is known during the two-week period ending August 18, when the last troops returned to France.



Posted with a military free frank on August 4 at the "Corps Expédre Rome 2" bureau  
Rated paid per 'PD' marking – arrived August 7 – **only 3 free franked covers are known**



Dated August 15 at Civita Vecchia – "nous sommes seul à Civita Va avec l'administration"  
Posted with a military free frank on August 18 at the "Corps Expédre Rome 2" bureau  
**Latest known use from this bureau** - arrived on August 21

# Campaign in the Ardennes

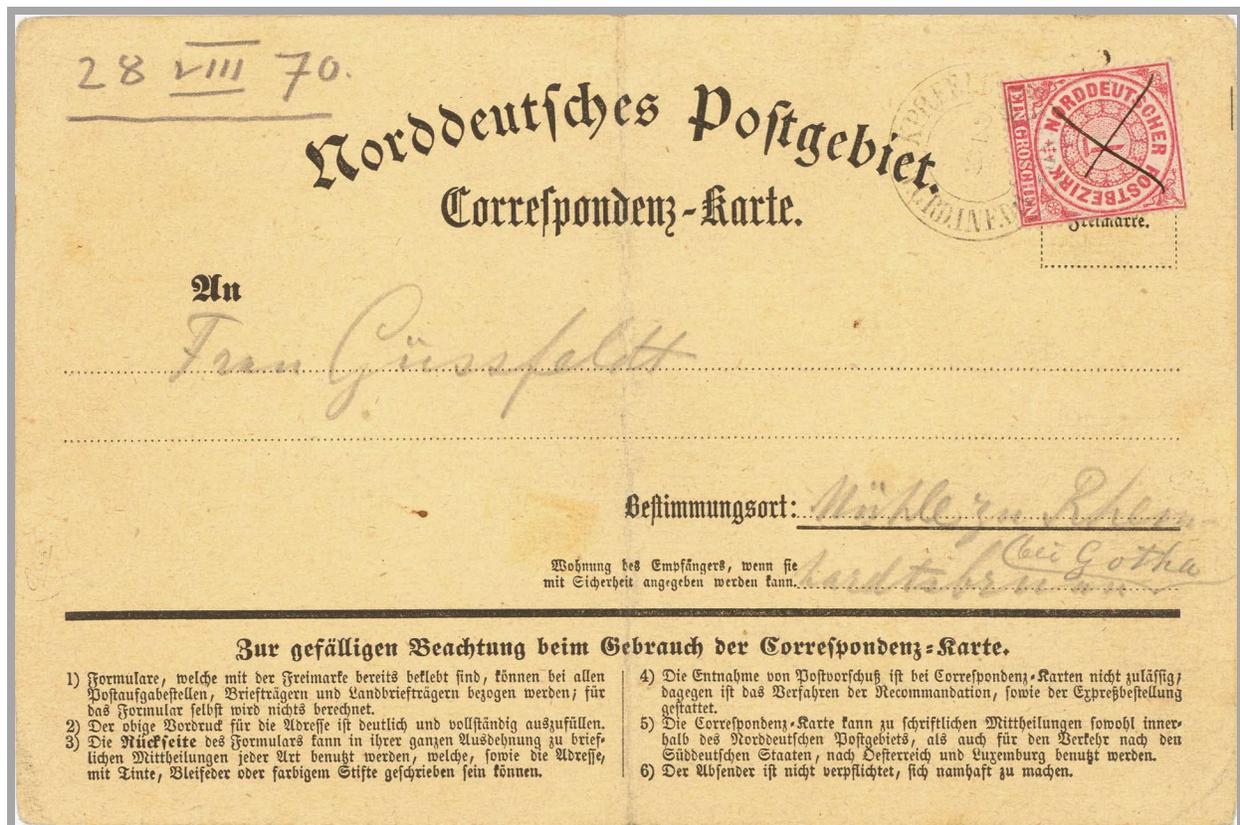
## German Advance to Sedan: August 23 – September 1



The German III and IV Armies advanced from Nancy and Metz on August 23 to pursue the Armée de Châlons through the Ardennes.



Posted August 28 at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Division (III Army) bureau – arrived August 30 in Frankfurt



Dated Clermont August 28 - prepaid 1 groschen at the 1<sup>st</sup> Garde Infantry Division (IV Army)

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### Siege of Verdun: September 23 – November 8



During its pursuit of the Armée de Châlons, the IV Army passed by Verdun on August 24 and unsuccessfully attempted to capture the fortress. It left a small force, which was reinforced on September 23 to begin the siege. Verdun surrendered on November 8.



Dated October 30 at Verdun – carried through the siege line to Belgium  
Posted unpaid at Virton, Belgium on November 3 with 2 décimes postage due  
From a sergeant in the Garde Mobile artillery – arrived November 8 in Montélimar  
**Only letter known from this siege**



**Print of the German occupation of Verdun**

## Campaign in the Ardennes

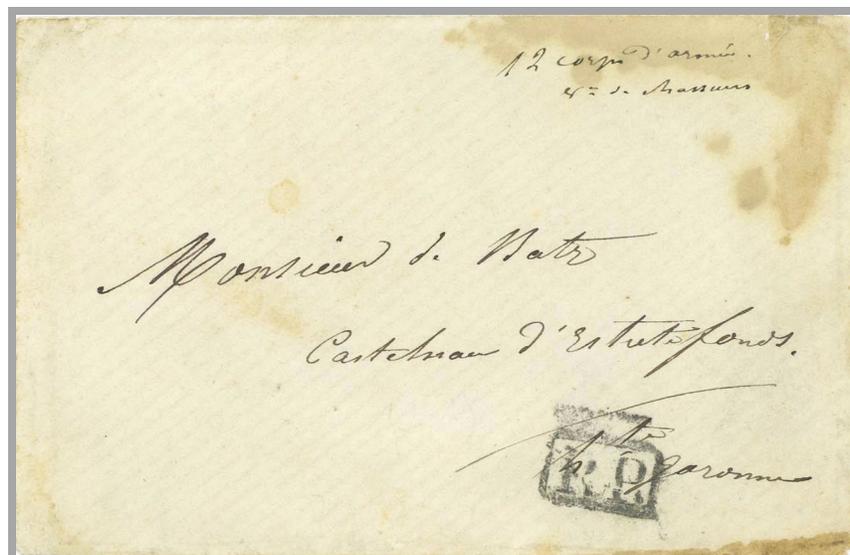
### French Advance to Sedan: August 23 – September 1



On August 23, the Armée de Châlons left Reims to lift the siege of French army in Metz. The plan was to advance northeast and trap the German II Army between the two French armies.



Posted August 25 at the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Division Bureau AF – arrived August 28  
The 7<sup>th</sup> Corps was holding the southern flank at Vouziers



Dated August 26 at Reithel by a 4<sup>th</sup> Chasseurs d'Afrique cavalry officer  
Taken by 12<sup>th</sup> Corps payeur to Reithel for posting with 'P.P.' – arrived August 28  
**The 12<sup>th</sup> Corps was in existence for only 17 days and had no fieldpost markings**

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### French Advance to Sedan: August 23 – September 1



On August 30, the Germans routed the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps northeast of Buzancy, so the Armée de Châlons retreated north to Sedan. Their latest fieldpost postmarks are dated on August 29.



Posted August 29 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Division Bureau A south of Sedan  
**20c franking cancelled 'IB'** (Irun-Bordeaux ambulante) - arrived September 2



Posted August 29 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps' 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Bureau B – **red postmark**  
The 1<sup>st</sup> Corps was at Raucourt enroute to Sedan

# Campaign in the Ardennes

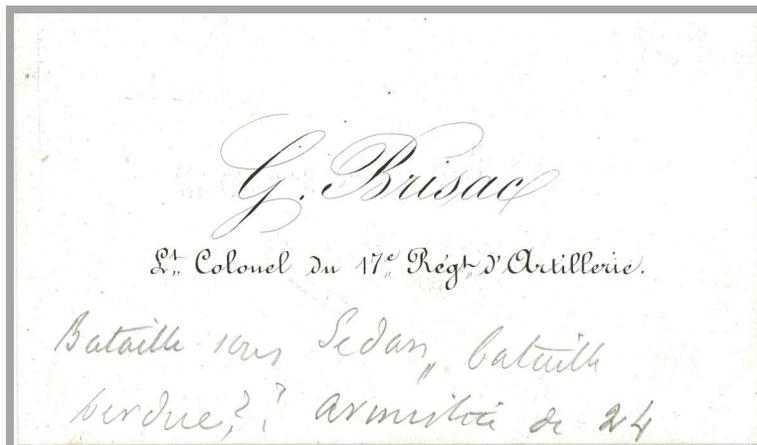
## September 1 Battle of Sedan



At 5pm on September 1, Napoléon III surrendered with 110,000 French soldiers. It was one of the greatest military disasters in French history. Only the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps escaped the encirclement.



Posted September 3 in Sedan with a military free frank per the 'P.P.' marking  
From captured artillery officer – smuggled November 13 to Givet for forwarding



Carte de visite with scribbled note written on September 1

## Campaign in the Ardennes

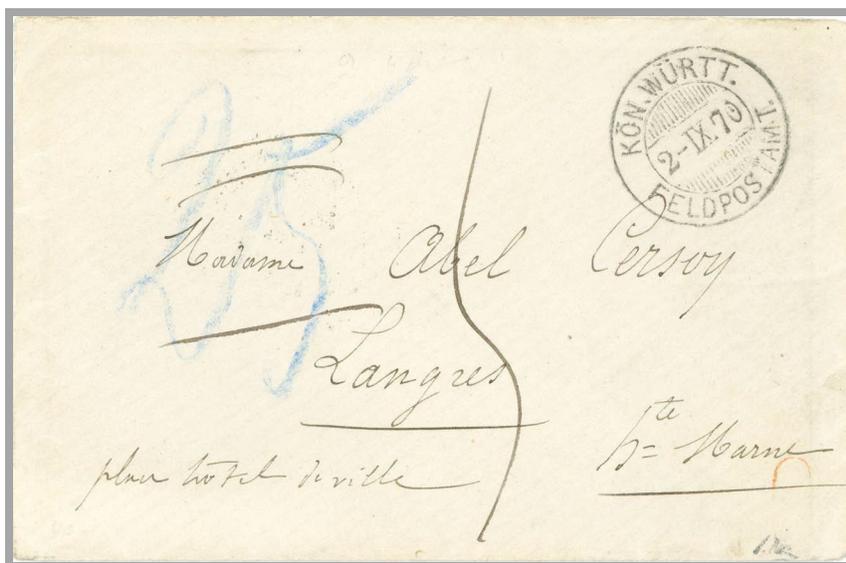
### September 1 Battle of Sedan



Following the French surrender at Sedan, the German III and IV Armies collected the large number of French prisoners and made preparations for an advance on Paris.



Dateline from the 10<sup>th</sup> French ambulance at Raucourt, near Sedan  
Postmarked on September 2 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division's Bayer VI bureau  
4 décimes postage due in Brussels, Belgium on September 9



Posted September 2 at the Württemberg Division's HQ bureau at Sedan  
From Captain Cersoy of the 8<sup>th</sup> Lancers (7<sup>th</sup> Corps) – arrived October 7 with 50c due

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### Aftermath of the Battle of Sedan

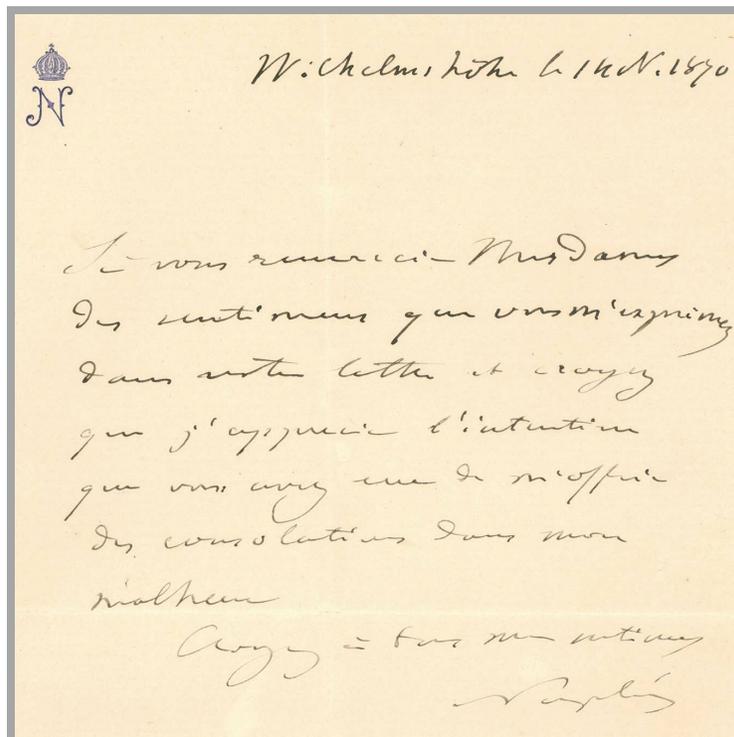


The most notable prisoner from Sedan was Emperor Napoléon III. He was taken to captivity at Wilhelmshöhe castle (near Cassel) until March 19, 1871. He never returned to his throne.



Napoléon III

Posted November 14 at Cassel - prepaid 2½ groschen in North German Confederation stamps  
**Letter from prisoner Napoléon III** – arrived November 17 in Fareham, England



Scan of the letter at 85%

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### Aftermath of the Battle of Sedan



Officers of the Armée de Châlons were given the option of going into captivity with their men, or going free by giving their word not to fight again in the war. Only 550 officers gave such a parole.



Posted November 24 at the Paris (SC) bureau – left on the balloon “Ville d’Orléans”  
Addressed to Général Douay, commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps, captured at Sedan  
Prepaid 30c rate to Mannheim – arrived December 18, but Douay had moved  
Forwarded 5 times – **Coblentz and Cassel POW camp markings** on the reverse



“Bataille de Sedan” by Hubert Cloutier (1901)

## Campaign in the Ardennes

### Aftermath of the Battle of Sedan



A large number of French soldiers escaped capture at Sedan by crossing over the nearby Belgian frontier. Once in Belgium, they were disarmed and interned for the duration of the war.



Posted September 26 in Laeken, Belgium – prepaid 30c rate to France  
From a 5<sup>th</sup> Corps soldier who escaped on September 16 – arrived October 1



Posted January 27 in Liège, Belgium – prepaid **10c concession rate** for French soldiers  
From 1<sup>st</sup> Corps soldier interned in Liège – arrived February 1 in Montmarault

# Campaign in the Ardennes

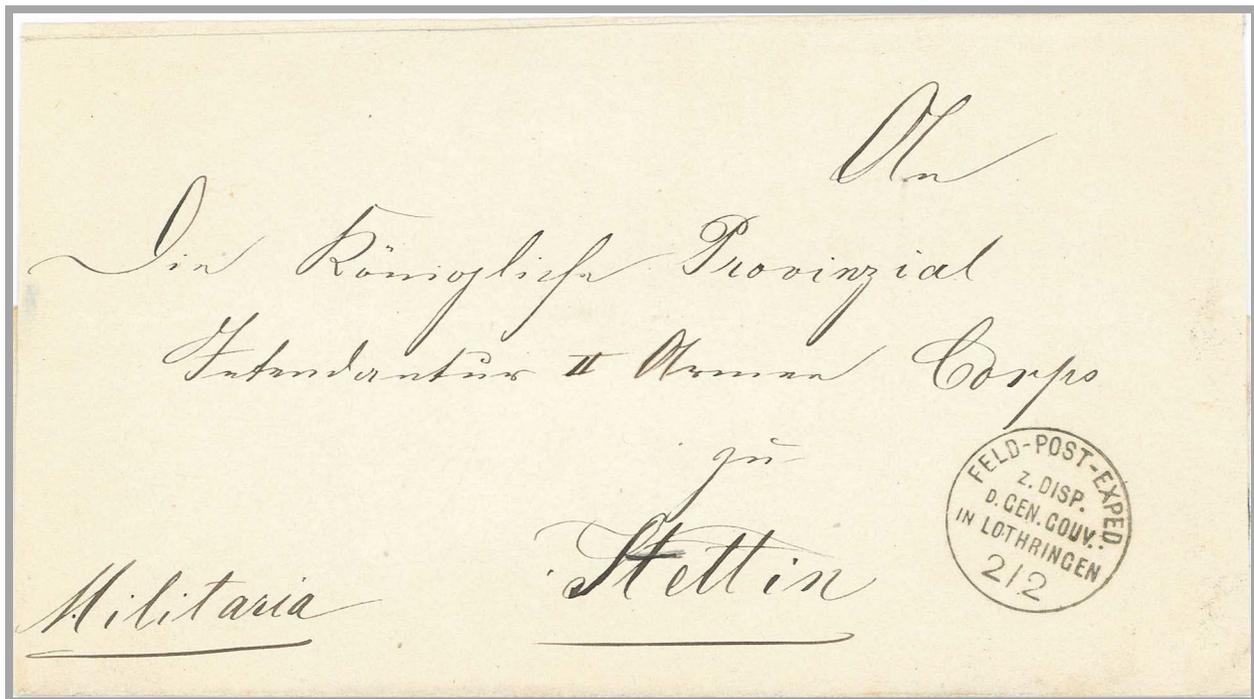
## German Reserve Army: September 25 – March 7



The Reserve Army was based at Reims to protect supply lines. Mecklenburg's Corps was replaced there by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Landwehr Division.



Posted September 30 at the Mecklenburg Corps bureau at Reims – **only example known**  
The Mecklenburg Corps became the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps and joined the Paris siege on October 28



Posted February 2 at the Lorraine Governor-General's bureau in Reims – **scarce bureau**  
Governor-General commanded the Reserve Army at Reims - arrived February 6

# Campaign in the Ardennes

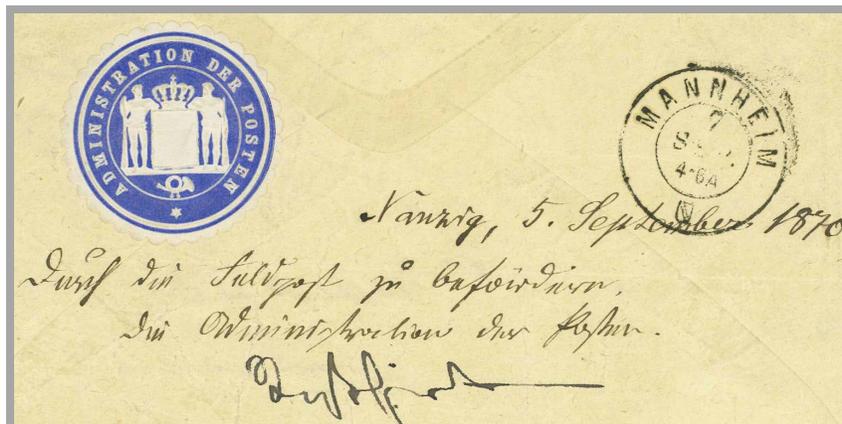
## German Reserve Army: August 23 – March 7



The III Army left a reserve force at Nancy under a Governor-General. It used the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps Avantgarde fieldpost postmark.



Censored September 5 at Nancy and transferred to the fieldpost administration  
Franked by 10c and 20c Alsace-Lorraine Issue stamps **four days before their official issue**  
Postmarked September 6 at the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps Avantgarde bureau used by the Governor-General  
Arrived September 7 in Baden – **earliest known use of Alsace-Lorraine stamps**



Scan of reverse at 85%.