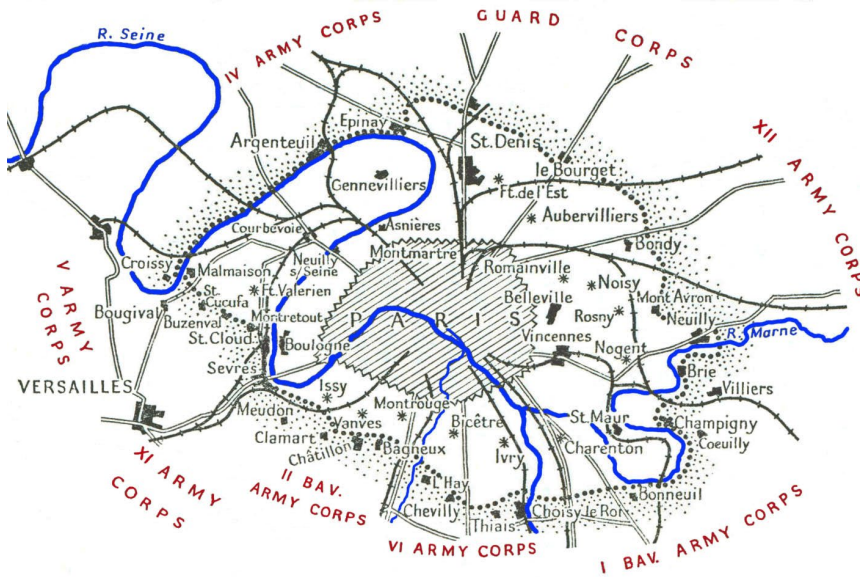


The Postal History of the Campaign for Paris during the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War

Background: On September 18, 1870, the 180,000 men of the German III and IV Armies cut postal communications with Paris and began the siege a day later. Paris was protected by external forts and a 500,000-man garrison consisting of 80,000 regular army soldiers, 110,000 reservists in the Garde Mobile and 300,000 national guards. After many small combats and two failed breakouts, the Parisian army surrendered on January 28, 1871.



Map of the initial German siege positions (in red). French external forts are denoted by stars

Postal Background: The French and Germans provided fieldpost services for their regular army units. Other French military units used civilian post offices to send their mail. Mail sent outside of Paris was carried by manned balloons over the German siege line.



October 10 letter endorsed "Armée de Paris" by a Garde Mobile de la Vienne

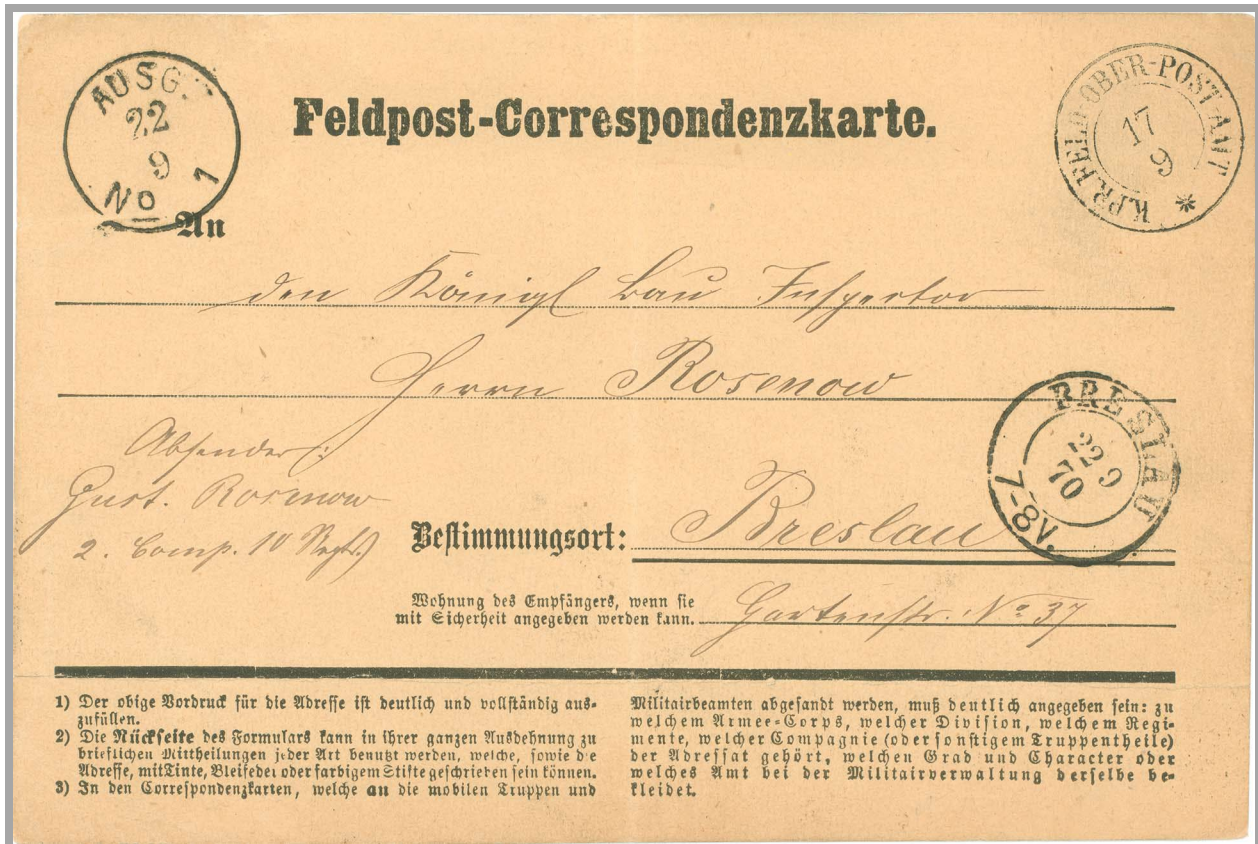
Scope, Study and Presentation: This exhibit is organized by military unit or military activity, which is identified in the sub-headings. Text boxes provide historical or postal background, and greater detail is provided in the body of the page. Icons at the upper right identify French or German armies, or battles between them.

Campaign for Paris

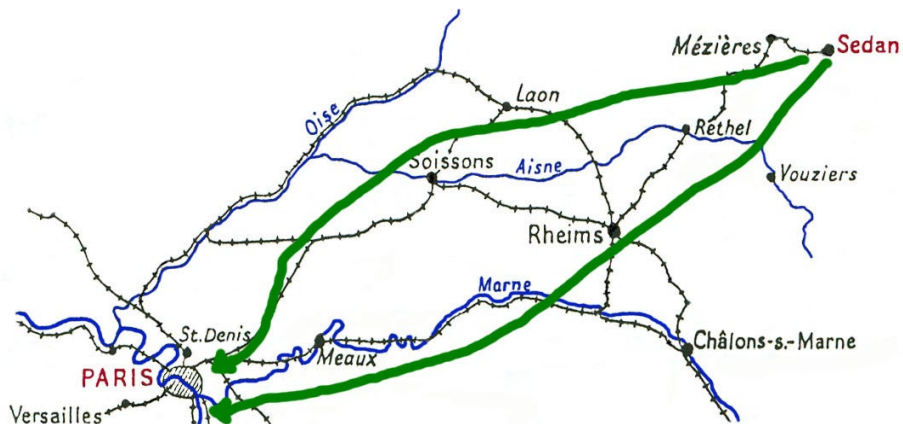
German Advance on Paris: September 3-18



The German III and IV Armies left Sedan on September 3 for an advance via Laon and Reims to Paris. On September 19, the III Army completed the siege line south of Paris, while the IV Army occupied the northern sector.



Dated near Meaux on September 16 – posted next day at the Grand Headquarters bureau
From the 10th Grenadier Regiment of the 6th Corps (III Army) – arrived September 22



Map of the advance (in green) of the III and IV Armies from Sedan to Paris

Campaign for Paris

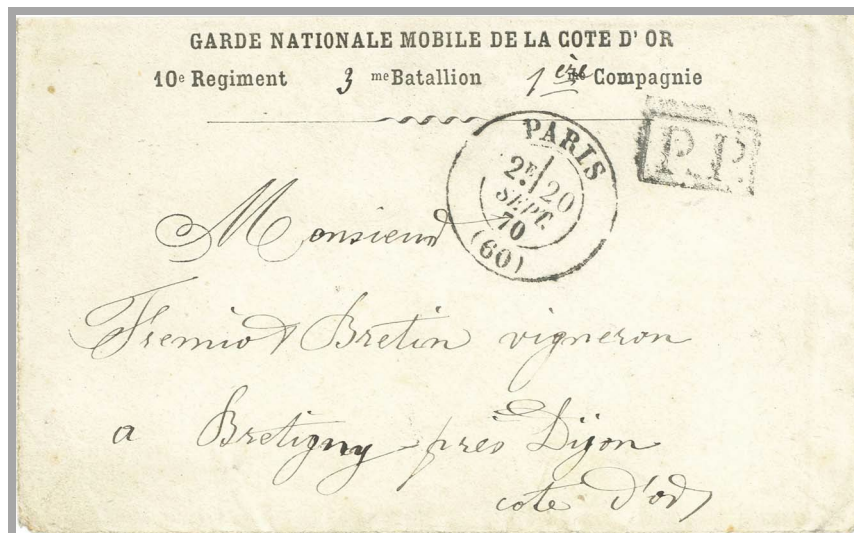
Start of the Paris Siege: September 18-19



The last rail connection was cut after 5pm on September 18, and the German investment was completed the following day. Mail posted after the 4th collection period on September 18 was trapped in the siege.



Posted unpaid on September 18 (6th collection) in Paris – rated for 30c due per Paris postmark
Endorsed from the 13th Corps at Vincennes, so re-rated for military free frank per the red “P.P.”
Carried out by postal line-crosser on September 24 – arrived September 27 near Tours



Posted September 20 at the central Paris post office with a free frank per the “P.P.”
Endorsed from a soldier in the 10th Regiment of the Garde Mobile de la Côte d'Or
Carried out by postal line-crosser on September 27 – arrived October 1 near Dijon



Campaign for Paris

French 13th Corps: September 17 – November 7

The kernel of the Armée de Paris was the 31,000-man regular army 13th Corps, which had escaped from the disaster at Sedan to reach Paris on September 6-9. Its fieldpost service began operations on September 17.



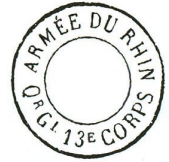
Dated September 22 in Paris by Général Vinoy, commander of the 13th Corps
Marked “Ministre de la Guerre” and given to the balloon service - prepaid 20c on the reverse
Left September 23 in **official sack of the first balloon “Neptune”** – arrived September 25



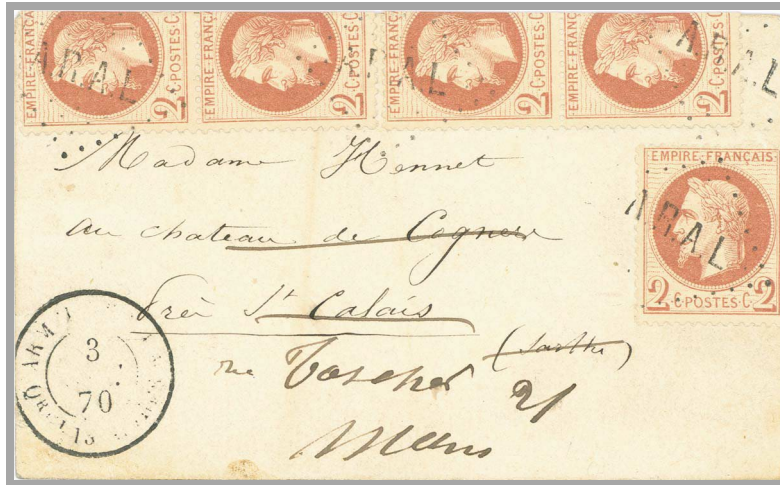
Dated September 16 at Charenton - endorsed from the 13th Corps' 1st Division
Postmarked on September 17 at the 1st Division's Bureau AL – arrived September 19
“Depuis hier nous avons avec nous des officiers du Trésor...”

Campaign for Paris

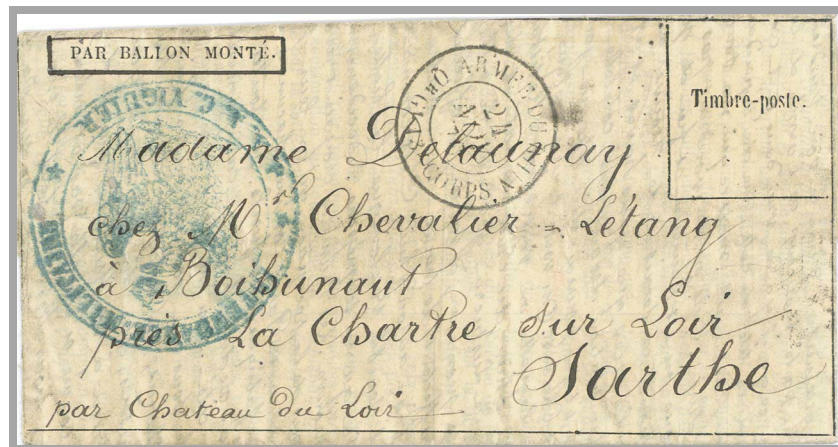
French 13th Corps: September 17 – November 7



The 13th Corps was the last corps to be assigned "Armée du Rhin" postmarks: HQ and Bureaus AL, AM and AN for the 1st through 3rd Divisions.



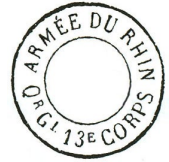
Postmarked "Armée du Rhin Qr G 13^e Corps" on October 3 - "Jean Bart #2" left October 16
Prepaid 10 centimes postcard rate by **five 1863 Issue 2c stamps** – cancelled "A.R.A.L."
From Colonel Hennet of the artillery reserve – arrived October 24 in Le Mans



Gazette des Absents #2 newsletter posted November 24 at the Headquarters bureau
From mailbag jettisoned in the North Sea by the "Ville d'Orléans" – 20c franking lost in water
Private "Intendance Militaire" unit marking – arrived December 14 at La Chartre-s-Loir

Campaign for Paris

French 13th Corps: September 17 – November 7



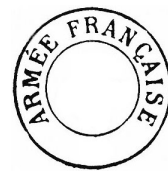
Postmarked November 6 at the 1st Division's Bureau AL - "Gironde" left November 8
Overpaid **30 centimes rate to Ireland by two 1862 Issue 20c stamps** – cancelled "A.R.13^e C"
Bureau AL used the "A.R.13^e C" cancel while the HQ bureau used the "A.R.A.L" cancel



Posted October 17 at the 2nd Division's Bureau AM - "Victor Hugo" left October 18
1863 Issue 10c and 20c stamps underpaid the **40c rate to Wiesbaden** – cancelled "A.R.A.M"
Censored at Versailles per the "**Auswärtiges Amt des Norddeutschen Bundes**" mark

Campaign for Paris

French 14th Corps: September 17 – November 7



The 33,000-man 14th Corps was the other regular army unit of the Armée de Paris. It was formed on September 9, and its fieldpost service began operations in mid-October using “Armée Française” postmarks.



Dateline Porte Maillot and postmarked “Armée Française Quart^r Gal” on November 8
Prepaid 20c for the balloon service – carried in the “Daguerre” recovered bag
Private 14th Corps headquarters marking – arrived November 28 in Périgueux



1st Division’s “Armée Française 14^e Corps A” red postmark applied at Clichy on October 29
Prepaid **50c postage to Italian Papal States** – left Paris November 2 aboard the “Fulton”
Routed via England per November 4 Calais-Paris postmark - arrived November 10

Campaign for Paris

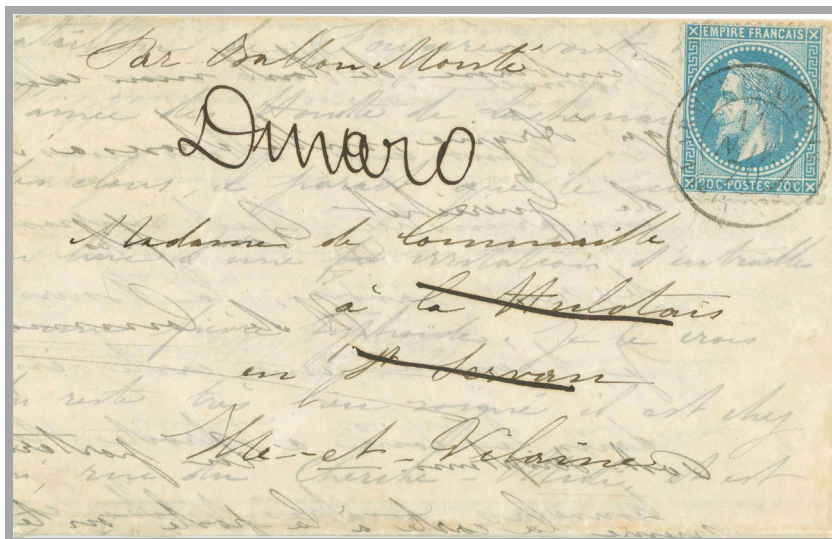
French 14th Corps: September 17 – November 7



On October 28, the 2nd Brigade of the 14th Corps' 2nd Division was detached to the 13th Corps, so the 2nd Division never received a fieldpost service. The 3rd Division received Bureau B in early November, and only one example of that postmark is known.



Dated November 1 at Ivry by a corporal in the 14th Corps' 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division
Posted that day at the 13th Corps' 2nd Division Bureau AM at Bicêtre – arrived November 5
Prepaid 20c for the balloon service – left Paris November 2 on the “Fulton”



3rd Division's “Armée Française 14^e Corps B” postmark applied at Boulogne on November 14
From Baron de Cornaille, officer with the 14th Corps' 3rd Division – arrived November 25
Prepaid 20c balloon mail postage – left Paris November 21 aboard the “Archimède”

Campaign for Paris

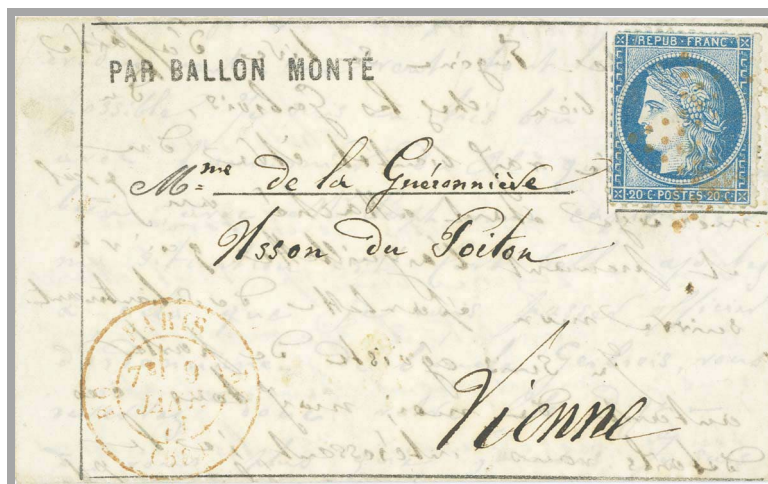
Garde Mobile: September 17 – January 27



The Garde Mobile was a reserve consisting of men who had avoided conscription into the regular army. 93 battalions from 25 departments were called to Paris to bolster the city's defenses, but were not provided with a dedicated fieldpost.



Dated December 12 at Poulangis and posted in Paris on December 15
Prepaid 20c balloon mail rate by a **10c tête-bêche pair** of the 1870 “Ceres” Issue
Private cachet of the 40th Regiment of Ain mobiles – left December 17 on the “Parmentier”



Dated January 8 at Vincennes by a lieutenant in the Garde Mobile de la Vienne
Posted at the Paris (RC) bureau on January 9 - 20c franking cancelled by red star
Left January 11 on the “Kepler” – **one of two known Paris (RC) postmarks**

Campaign for Paris

Garde Mobile: September 17 - January 27



Jules Leveillé, cabinet head with the Telegraph Service, offered priority mail handing and a free frank to mobiles from his home department of Ille et Vilaine. He took their letters directly to departing balloons, so they did not pass through the Paris post office.



Dated October 20 - endorsed "Garde mobile d'Ille et Vilaine" and to Jules Leveillé
Left October 27 on the "Bretagne" - posted October 29 at Fresnes-en-Voëvre landing spot
This balloon carried no post office mail so not many letters are known



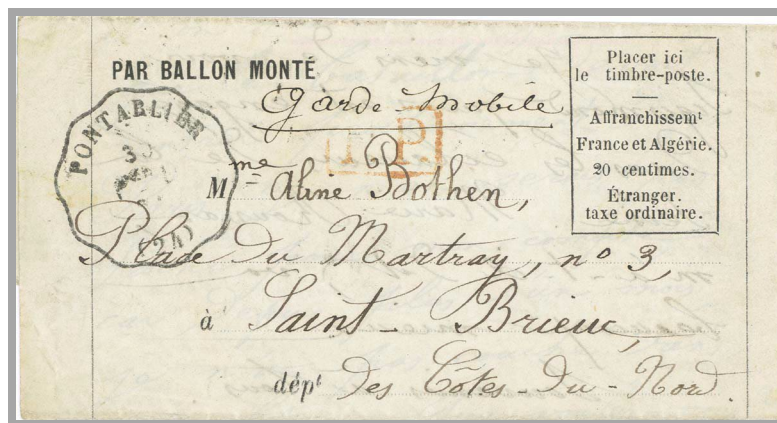
Dated November 14 at Neully and endorsed to the care of Jules Leveillé
Left November 18 on the "Général Uhrich" - posted on November 23 at Rennes
Private cachet of the 2nd Battalion of Ille et Vilaine mobiles

Campaign for Paris

Garde Mobile: September 17 - January 27



The balloon "Montgolfier" left Paris on October 25 and was captured in occupied Alsace. Two passengers escaped capture and reached free France with a small number of confided letters.



Dated October 18 at Rosny camp and endorsed "Garde Mobile"
Carried by Colonel Le Bouëdec of the Garde Mobile des Côtes du Nord
Posted October 30 at Pontarlier with a free frank per the red "P.P."



Dated October 23 in Paris and franked 20c for the balloon service
Carried by Colonel Delapierre, commander of the 62nd Regiment of Mobiles
Posted November 4 at Tours - arrived in St. Malo the next day

Campaign for Paris

Garde Nationale: September 18 – January 27



The Garde Nationale was a third-line reserve for local defense, consisting of 344,000 men in 254 battalions, half of which were combat battalions. They were not provided with a fieldpost service.



Dated December 23 in Paris and **confided to balloon builders Dartois & Yon**
Left December 27 on private balloon "Merlin de Douai" – carried no post office mail
Postmarked on December 30 at Bordeaux – 20c franking cancelled GC "3997"
Garde Nationale pilot created a special cachet for this balloon

**BALLON MERLIN DE DOUAI
CAP. GRIZEAUT, LIEUT. TARBE**

Campaign for Paris

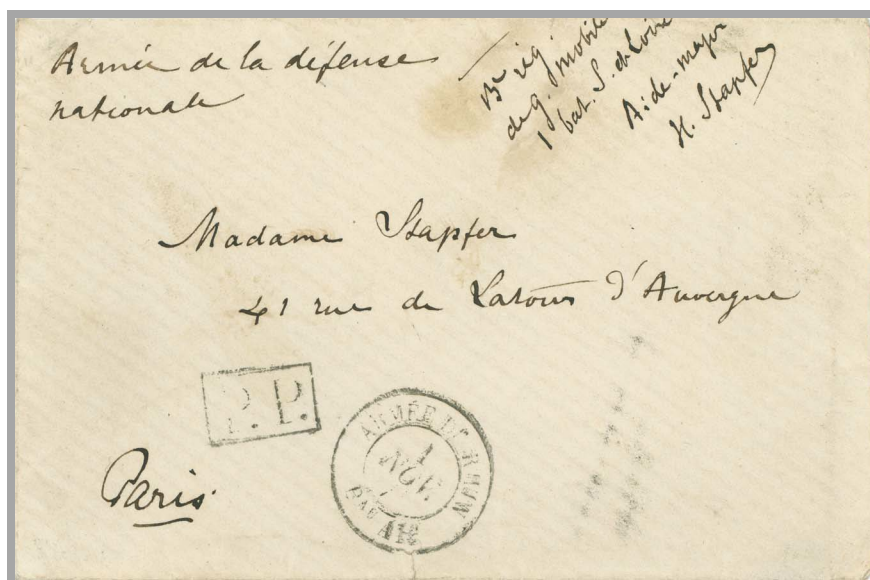
Corps de St. Denis: October 28 – January 27



The Corps de St. Denis was a three-brigade independent command formed to defend the northern sector of Paris



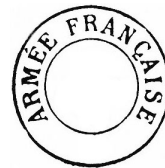
Dated "Redoute de Noisy" on November 15 by Col. Martin of the 138th Regiment
Postmarked November 14 at the Paris (SC) bureau – **granted late free frank**
Left November 18 on the "Général Uhrich" – posted at Luzarches landing point



Posted with free frank on November 1 at the **Armée du Rhin Bureau AH**
Payeur had escaped from Sedan to Paris and was attached to Corps de St. Denis
From the 13th Regiment of Garde Mobile de la Saône-et-Loire – sent locally

Campaign for Paris

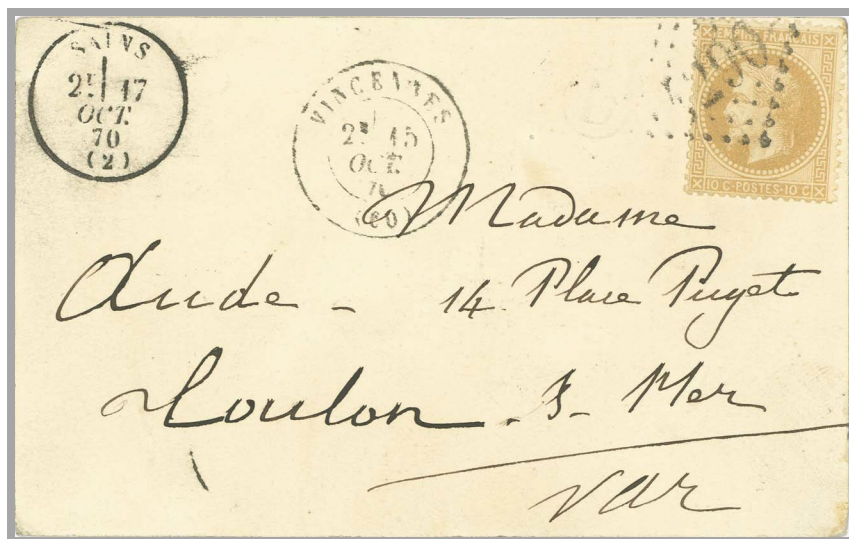
Naval Forces: September 18 – January 27



Four marine infantry battalions and 12 ship crew battalions (13,900 men) garrisoned Parisian external forts, but were not provided with fieldpost services.



Datelined at Bicêtre fort – posted October 21 at nearby Maison-Blanche post office
20c stamp cancelled by **rare petits chiffres 2170** – left next day on the “Garibaldi”
2nd Battalion of Marine Infantry used the **boxed “Marins de Lorient”** marking



Datelined at Nogent fort – posted October 15 at nearby Vincennes post office
10c postcard rate – jettisoned on October 16 from the “Jean Bart #2” over Soissons
Rare **October 17 Sains recovery postmark** – from a naval medical officer

Campaign for Paris

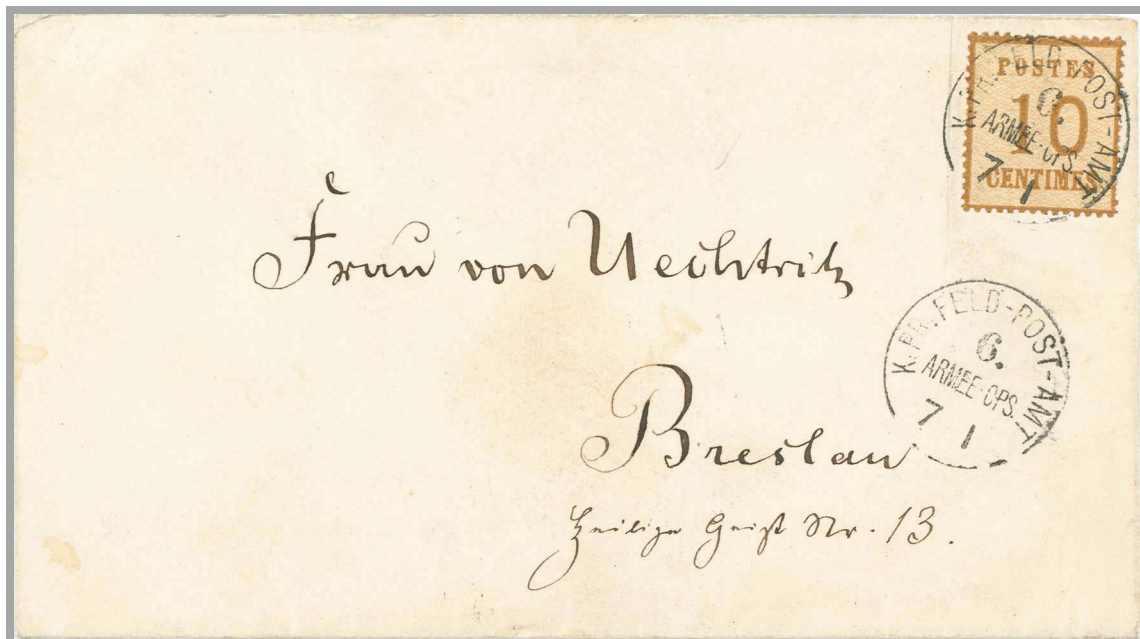
German III Army: September 16 – January 27



The German III Army moved into siege lines south of the city, starting on September 16. The investment was completed on September 19.



Posted September 17 at the III Army headquarters bureau near Meaux
Prepaid 20c in cash per German "f20" plus 20c stamp for French postage
German fieldpost cancel on a French stamp is rare – arrived October 2



Posted prepaid 10c at the III Army's 6th Corps bureau on January 7 – arrived January 12
German fieldpost cancels on Alsace-Lorraine Issue stamps are rare

Campaign for Paris

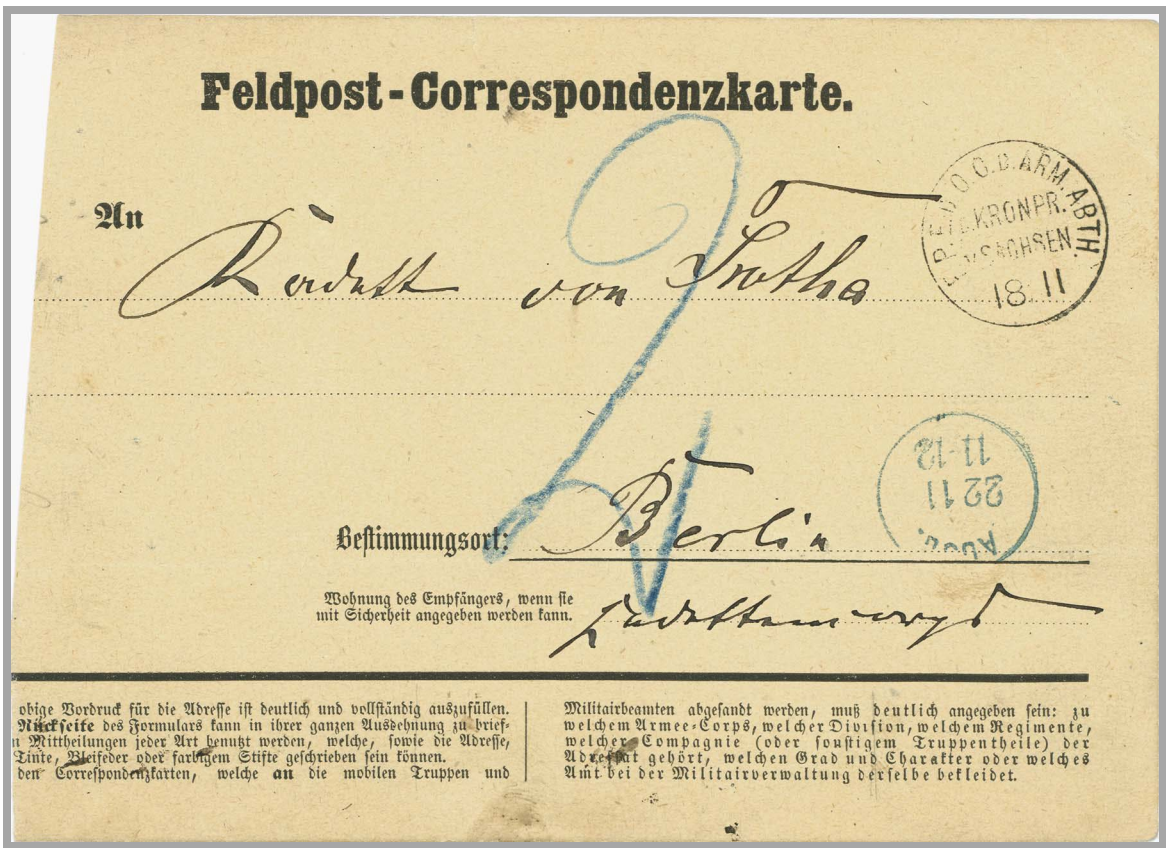
German IV Army: September 16 – January 27



The German IV Army moved into siege lines north of the city, starting on September 16. The investment was completed on September 19.



Posted prepaid 10c on October 20 at the IV Army's Guard Corps bureau – arrived October 26



Posted November 18 at the IV Army's headquarters bureau – 2 groschen due in Berlin

Campaign for Paris

Combat at Montmesly: September 17



The first combat took place opposite Charenton at Montmesly. The 1st Division of the 13th Corps attacked the German 5th Corps, which was moving to its sector. The French retreated.



Dated September 18 at Charenton - endorsed from the 13th Corps' 1st Division
Postmarked on September 18 at the 1st Division's Bureau AL - arrived September 25
"Nous avons eu hier notre première affaire...nous avons une dizaine d'hommes tués"
Carried out of Paris to Evreux on September 20 by the **first post office line-crosser**



"Combat outside of Paris" by Etienne Berne-Bellcour (1875)

Campaign for Paris

Combat at Villejuif: September 22-23



The 13th Corps' 2nd and 3rd Divisions attacked the German 6th Corps on the plateau of Villejuif, opposite the Bicêtre and Ivry forts. They successfully occupied the heights.



Dated September 25 in Paris by Général Vinoy, commander of the 13th Corps
Marked "Gouvernement de la défense Nationale" and prepaid 20c on the reverse
Left September 29 in **official sack of the "Etats-Unis"** – arrived October 2 in Nantes
"l'ennemi n'ose rien encore, c'est nous qui l'attaque..."



"Combat de Villejuif" by Edouard Detaille

Campaign for Paris

Combat at Chevilly: September 30



The 2nd and 3rd Divisions of the 13th Corps attacked the German 6th Corps opposite the Bicêtre and Ivry forts south of Paris. The French retreated to their starting points.



Dated October 1 at Bicêtre by an officer in the 2nd Division of the 13th Corps
Postmarked in red on October 1 at the 2nd Division's Bureau AM – “A.R.A.M” cancel
Carried out of Paris on October 12 on the “Washington” – arrived October 17



Dated September 30 at Vanves – from Major Mowat of the 14th March Regiment
Postmarked on October 1 at the 3rd Division's Bureau AN – free frank per red “P.P.”
Carried out of Paris on October 12 on the “Washington” – arrived October 16

Campaign for Paris

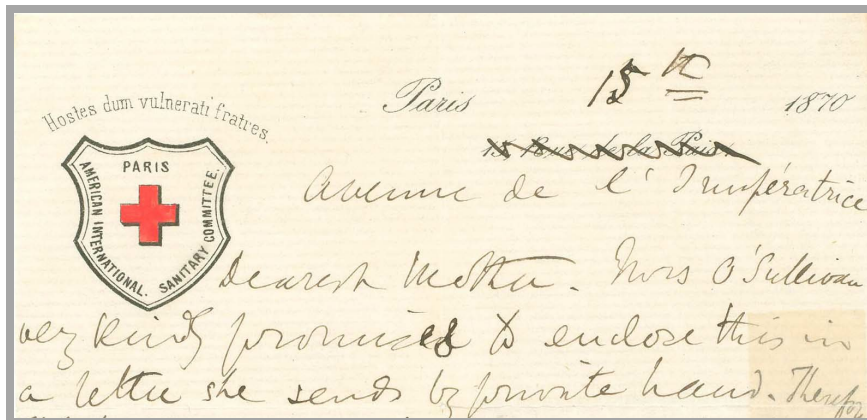
Combat at Châtillon: October 13-14



The 3rd Division of the 13th Corps and Garde Mobile battalions from the 10th Regiment of Côte d'Or and the 59th Regiment of Aube attacked the 2nd Bavarian Corps south of Paris, but retreated to their starting points.



Dated October 15 by a British surgeon - confided to Nadar's balloon builder company **Red Aérostiers cachet** - left October 18 on the "Victor Hugo" - posted October 21 at Tours
Unpaid letter marked with red "*FR* 1^F 50^C" tray mark for 40c debit - 6d due in London
"we went out yesterday to the field of Chatillon & brought back only two wounded..."



Scan of letterhead (85%)

Campaign for Paris

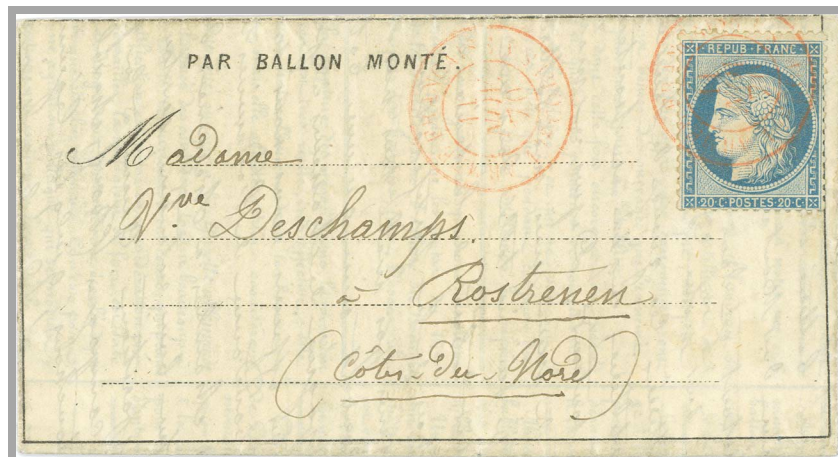
Formation of the 2^e Armée de Paris: November 8



On November 8, the French re-organized their best combat units into a new 2^e Armée that would attempt to break out of Paris. Until new fieldpost postmarks could be made, they continued to use the old ones.



Postmarked “Armée du Rhin Qr Gl 13^e Corps” on November 17 – free frank per “P.P.”
Left November 21 on the “Archimède” – arrived November 25 in Nantes
Private “2^{me} Armée 1^{re} Corps Etat-Major Général” marking



Dépêche-Ballon #4 newsletter datelined November 10 at Clichy-la-Garenne
Red November 11 “Armée Française 14^e Corps A” postmark – 20c franking
Used by 2nd Corps of the 2^e Armée - carried in captured “Daguerre” mailbag

Campaign for Paris

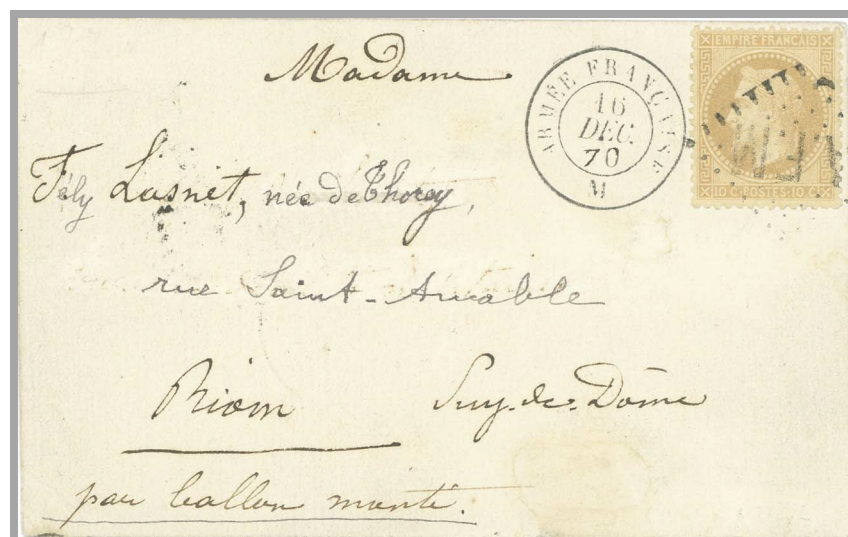
2^e Armée Fieldpost: November 28 – December 19



Starting November 28, the three corps of the 2^e Armée began receiving their 12 fieldpost bureaus. By the December 19 re-organization, only 8 were in use. Fewer than 40 2^e Armée covers are known from this period.



Postmarked December 12 at the 3rd Corps' 1st Division Bureau L – "A.F.L" cancel
Left December 15 on the "Ville de Paris" which was captured on landing in Prussia
No arrival postmarks appear on captured mail – **only letter known from Bureau L**



Dated December 17 by a captain in the 105th Regiment – franked 10c for postcard rate
Postmarked December 19 (inverted "9") at the 3rd Corps' 3rd Division Bureau M – "A.F.M" cancel
Left December 22 on the "Lavoisier" – arrived December 27 – **3 Bureau M letters are known**

Campaign for Paris

Formation of the 1^{re} Armée de Paris: November 9



On November 9, the French government decreed the formation of 59 National Guard “war” regiments, which became the 1^{re} Armée. They were assigned to help defend Paris after the departure of the 2^e Armée, but were not provided with a fieldpost service.



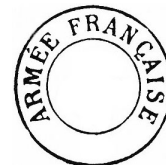
Gazette des Absents #17 datelined December 24 at Rosny-s-Bois by “2^e Régiment de Paris”
Posted December 25 in Paris with a free frank per the “P.P.” – confirmed by star cancel
Left December 27 on the “Tourville” – arrived January 1 in southern France



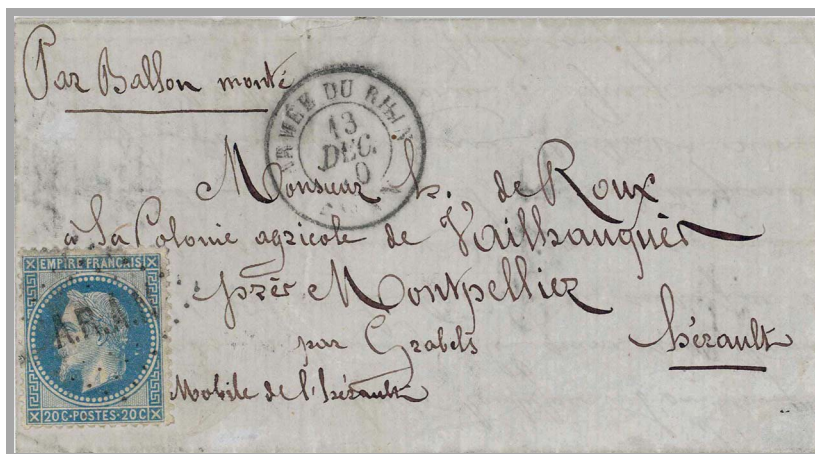
Datelined January 12 at Créteil – endorsed “38^e Régiment de Paris 118^e Bataillon”
Posted prepaid 20c in Paris on January 13 – from a National Guard surgeon
Left January 15 on the “Vaucanson” – arrived January 24 at Nozay

Campaign for Paris

Formation of the 3^e Armée de Paris: November 8



On November 8, fifteen of the Garde Mobile regiments in Paris were incorporated into the five divisions of the 3^e Armée, which would defend Paris after the departure of the 2^e Armée. Most were not provided with dedicated fieldpost services.



Dated December 12 at St. Maur – from 3^e Armée's Garde Mobile de l'Hérault
Postmarked "Armée du Rhin B^{au} AN" on December 13 – re-used temporarily at St. Maur
Left December 17 on the "Parmentier" – arrived December 29 in Montpellier



Franked by 5 20c (II) Bordeaux stamps in Montpellier on January 2 – response to above letter
Sent by "Boule de Moulins" to Paris – rare June 22 Paris Poste Restante arrival postmark
Addressed to the 45th Regiment of Garde Mobile de l'Hérault of the 3^e Armée

Campaign for Paris

Battle of Champigny: November 30 – December 3



The 2^e Armée began its breakout effort on November 30 with an attack on the Württemberg Division at Champigny. Reinforced by the 2nd Corps, the Germans repulsed the attack and the French retreated back to Vincennes on December 3.



Dated December 6 at Meaux by 1st Corps 2nd Division soldier captured at Champigny
"Je suis prisonnier de guerre depuis le 30 Novembre" – posted January 3 in Caen



Dated December 5 near Champigny - posted December 6 at the 2nd Corps HQ bureau

Campaign for Paris

3^e Armée Diversionary Attacks: November 29



To draw German reinforcements away from the 2^e Armée's attack at Champigny, the 3^e Armée conducted five diversionary attacks at different points around Paris.



Dated November 29 at Bicêtre by an officer in the Maud'huy Division of the 3^e Armée
Postmarked at Bureau D on November 30 - **division attacked L'Hay south of Paris**
Carried out of Paris on November 30 on the "Jules Favre No. 2" – arrived December 3



Dated November 29 at Colombes – **blue "3^{eme} Armée 2^{eme} Division" unit marking**
Postmarked December 1 in Paris – left Paris on December 5 aboard the "Franklin"
"...cette nuit, l'on a commencé à entendre une cannonade bien nourrie..."
Postmarked December 5 at Nantes, near the balloon's landing spot – arrived next day

Campaign for Paris

Reorganization of the 2^e Armée: December 4



The 1st Corps was decimated at Champigny, so it was dissolved and its regular soldiers were placed in the Reserve Division. The old 3rd Corps became the 2nd Corps, and the old 2nd Corps became the 1st Corps.



Dated December 12 by a captain in the 42nd Regiment of the Reserve Division
Postmarked December 12 at the 2^e Armée's headquarters Bureau A – “A.F.A” cancel
Left December 15 on the “Ville de Paris” which was captured – no arrival marks



Dated December 18 at Vincennes by a corporal in the 122nd Regiment
Postmarked December 19 at the Reserve Division's Bureau J – “A.F.J” cancel
Left December 22 on the “Lavoisier” – arrived December 25 in Bordeaux

Campaign for Paris

Second 2^e Armée Fieldpost: December 19 – January 28



Starting December 19, the nine military postmasters for the re-organized 2^e Armée began serving their new units. With the reduction from three to two corps, Bureaus K, L and M were discontinued.



Dated January 25 at Les Lilas by a soldier in the 108nd Regiment of the 2nd Corps
Postmarked January 26 at the 2nd Corps' headquarters Bureau F – red "A.F.F" cancel
Left January 27 on the "Jacquard" which was lost at sea – 20c stamp lost in water soaking



Gazette des Absents #25 datelined January 11 at Aubervilliers – 50 centimes franking
Postmarked January 12 at the 1st Corps' 1st Division Bureau C – datestamp cancel and blue "PD"
Left January 13 on the "Général Faidherbe" – arrived January 20 in Viterbo, Papal States

Campaign for Paris

Battle of Buzenval: January 19



90,000 French soldiers, including 42,000 from the Garde Nationale, made a final breakout effort against the German 5th Corps and the Garde Landwehr Division. They retreated back to Mont-Valérien.



Garde Nationale order to report for duty in the next day's Buzenval attack
Postmarked January 18 in Paris – franked 1870 Issue 20c stamp for balloon service
Left January 20 on the "Général Bourbaki" – arrived January 31 in Bordeaux



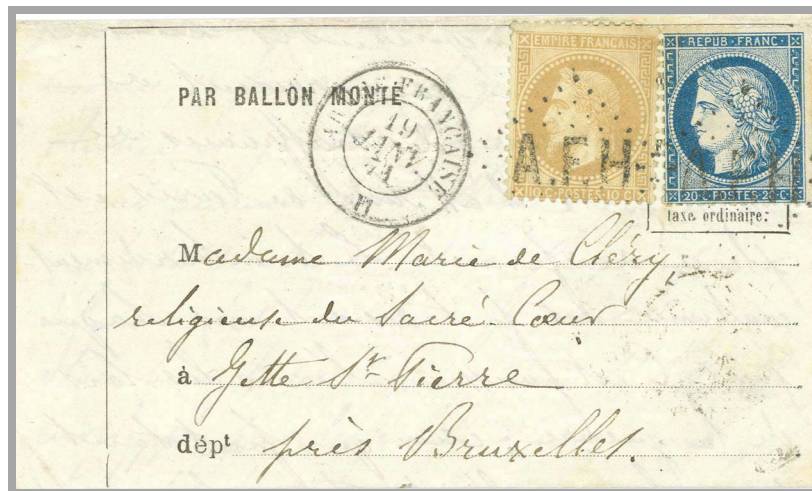
Postmarked January 16 at the Garde Landwehr Division bureau – sent to Garde Corps at Paris

Campaign for Paris

End of the 2^e Armée Fieldpost: January 29



On January 25, the 2^e Armée was dissolved. The soldiers moved into Paris on January 29, and the fieldpost stopped operating at that time. They evacuated Paris on March 15.



Dated January 18 at Bagnolet by a soldier in the 2nd Division of the 2nd Corps
Postmarked January 19 at the 2nd Division's Bureau H – "A.F.H" cancel
Left January 20 on the "Général Bourbaki" – **arrived January 25 in Belgium**



Dated January 11 by Captain Henri de Seroux of the 3rd Division of the 1st Corps
Postmarked January 12 at the 3rd Division's Bureau E – 20c stamp cancelled "A.F.E"
Left January 13 on the "Général Faidherbe" – **fewer than 5 covers known from Bureau E**

Campaign for Paris

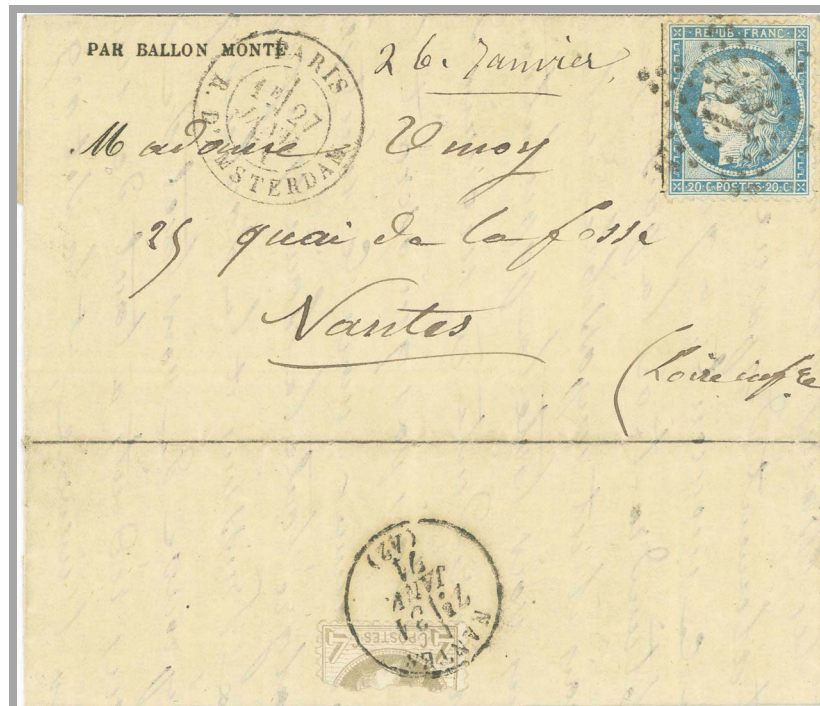
Surrender of Paris: January 28



On January 28, Paris surrendered and signed an armistice that extended to March 12. The balloon mail service ended with the last departure in the early morning of January 28.



Postmarked "Armée Française C" on January 28 – **latest known 2^e Armée postmark**
Left Paris sometime in February 1871 after the resumption of normal postal routes



Gazette des Absents #32 posted January 27 in Paris by **army commander Général Vinoy**
Left Paris on January 28 on the **last balloon "Général Cambronne"** – arrived January 31
"We are negotiating at this moment: at what price will we obtain peace?"

Campaign for Paris

German Occupation: January 28 – September 11, 1871



On March 1, France ratified the preliminary peace treaty. The Germans paraded through Paris that day and then withdrew from all positions south of the Seine River during March. They left their last positions around Paris on September 11, 1871.



Prepaid 10c occupation postage and 20c French postage by Parisian civilian
Postmarked "K. BAYER FELDPOST VI" on April 23 at Bavarian bureau near Vincennes
Transferred to nearby Fontenay-s-Bois on April 24 – French stamp cancelled GC "1543"
Arrived in occupied Metz on April 26 – charged 30c unpaid occupation postage due



Lithograph of the Germans marching through Paris on March 1, 1871