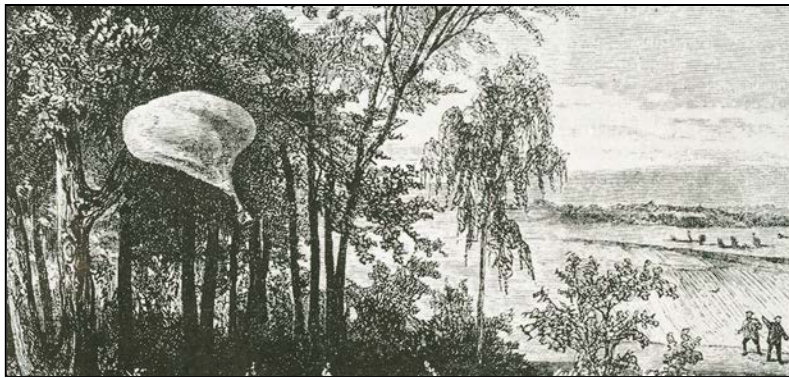


The Metz Balloon Posts: September 5 to October 3, 1870

Historical Background: France's Second Empire declared war with Prussia on July 19, 1870. By August 7, the German armies had pushed the French *Armée du Rhin* into disorderly retreat toward the French city of Metz in northeastern France. By August 19, nearly half of the *Armée du Rhin* was besieged in Metz, which surrendered on October 27. To maintain communications with unoccupied France, a series of unmanned balloons was launched with correspondence from the besieged garrison.

Postal Background: The Metz balloon post was actually two different services. Two military pharmacists, Jeannel and Papillon, conceived and initiated a service that carried between 40 and 140 single-sheet messages on each of fourteen unmanned balloons from September 5 to September 15. Eight of the Pharmacists' balloons were captured. In total, the service sent out about 1,500 letters, and an extensive census records only 19 surviving examples. These small slips of paper are called *papillons*, perhaps in honor of their inventor.



The Pharmacists were superseded by a more elaborate operation managed by military engineers and an English war correspondent named George Robinson. From September 16 to October 3, the Engineers' service launched eleven larger unmanned balloons with 5,000 to 32,000 messages each. Six of the balloons were captured, and approximately 180 of these *papillons* are known today. The Engineers' service was terminated on October 3 for security reasons.

Upon landing, uncaptured *papillons* were bundled by destination and sent to regional post offices in packets. Captured *papillons* generally never entered the postal system. As a result, many surviving *papillons* have no postal markings. A small number of *papillons* were forwarded inside envelopes (*enveloppes de réexpédition*) provided by the French post office.

Papillons addressed to foreign countries are rare. The census records 17 examples, of which 10 are addressed to Belgium or England.

Scope, Study and Presentation: This exhibit shows multiple examples of *papillons* from both the Pharmacists' and Engineers' balloon services. Although only 12% of the known *papillons* were sent under cover in *enveloppes de réexpédition*, the exhibit emphasizes such usages.

The balloon service is identified in sub-headings. Text boxes provide historical or postal background, and greater detail is provided in the body of the page. French and German names (in italics) are used wherever appropriate, and notable items are highlighted in bold type.

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Pharmacists' Balloon Service

The first Metz balloon service was started by military pharmacists on September 5, and lasted until September 15. They launched 14 balloons. Only 18 letters, or *papillons*, are known to have survived.



Dated *Sous Metz le 7 7bre 1870* - **carried by 5th Pharmacists' balloon**

This was the first successful flight, and left September 10 with 40 letters
Balloon landed near Lille - mail was recovered and processed on September 19

Only letter known from this balloon

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Pharmacists' Balloon Service

Some recovered *papillons* were forwarded inside of another envelope, or *enveloppe de réexpédition*. Fewer than ten examples from the Pharmacists' Balloon Service are known.



Dateline *Sous Metz 8 7bre 1870* - **6th Pharmacists' balloon** which carried about 50 *papillons*
September 14 Forbach *cachet d'atterrissage* defaced to conceal French origin

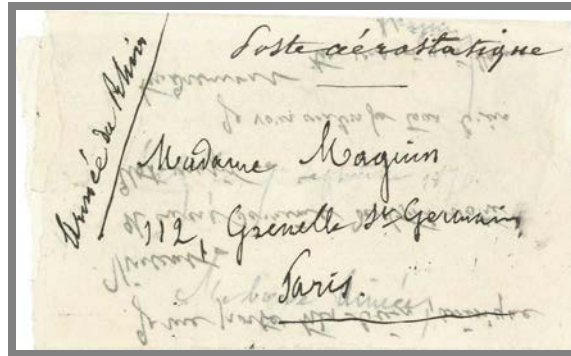


Carried across the frontier and posted unpaid in the above envelope on September 15 in Saarbrücken, Prussia
Trapped in Paris by September 18 start of siege - **forwarded by the first balloon "Neptune" or a linecrosser**

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Flag-of-Truce Into Besieged Paris



Dated Metz le 7 Septembre 1870 - 7th **Pharmacists' balloon** which carried 63 *papillons*

Captured on landing in Germany - forwarded to Bismarck's headquarters at Versailles

***Papillon* carried from Versailles into besieged Paris on October 14 by U.S. diplomatic courier**



Papillon given to 14th Corps officer - posted October 15 in the above envelope for delivery in Paris

Copyright: France and Colonies Philatelic Society

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

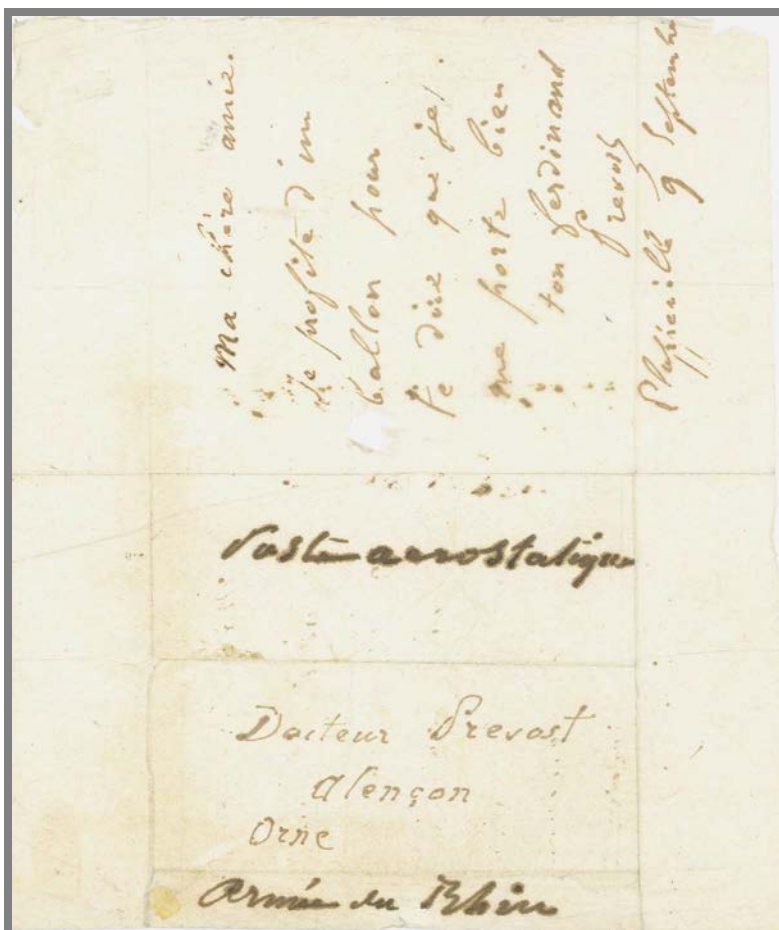
Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Pharmacists' Balloon Service

Eight of the 14 pharmacists' balloons were captured and their mail was typically destroyed. Surviving mail is known from only 3 captured balloons.



Dated *Sous Metz 10 7bre 1870* - 8th Pharmacists' balloon which carried about 90 papillons



Dated *Plappeville 9 Septembre* - 8th Pharmacists' balloon was captured near Elmstein, Germany

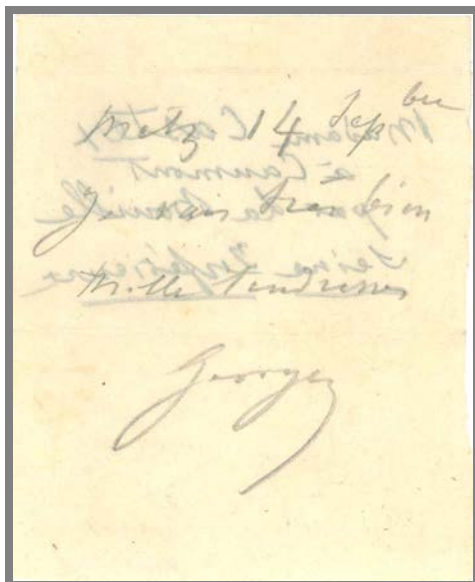
Copyright: France and Colonies Philatelic Society

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

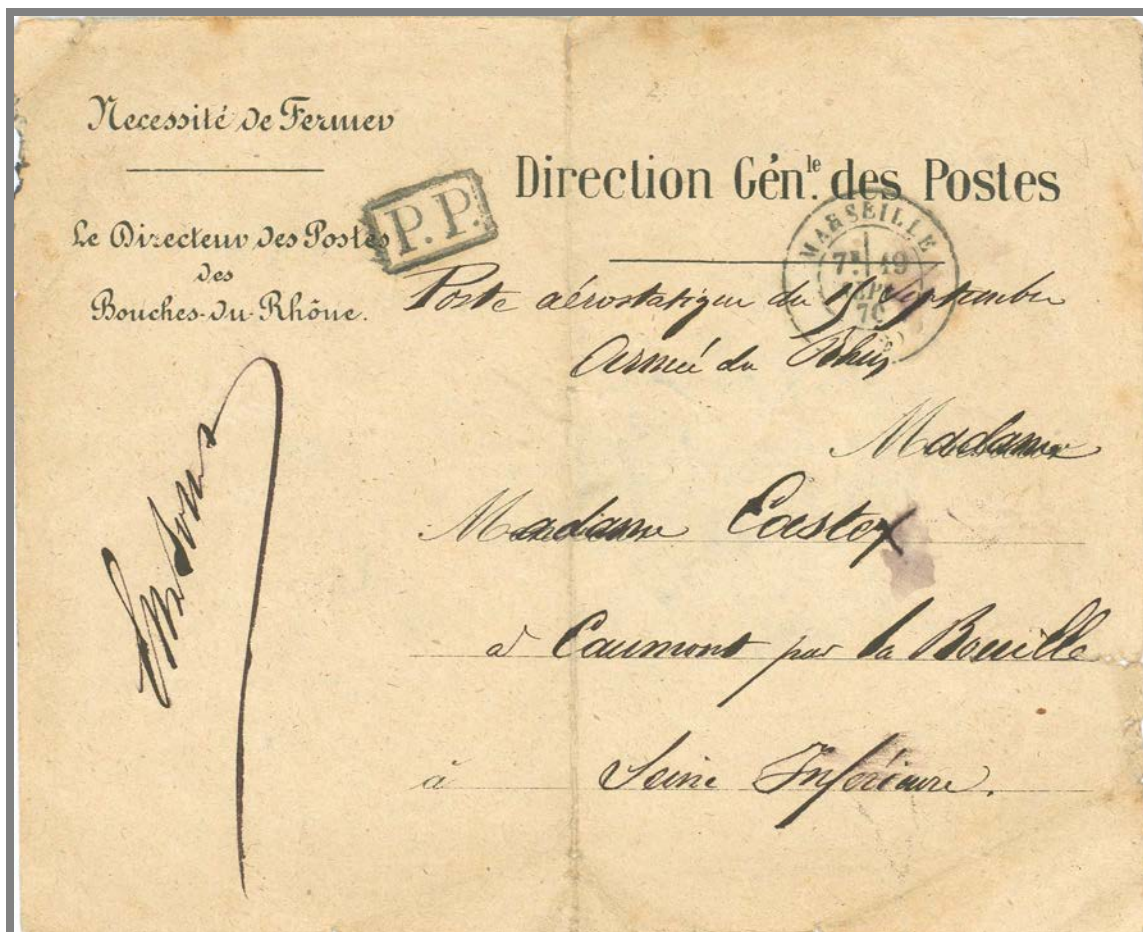
Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Pharmacists' Balloon Service

The 14th and final Pharmacists' balloon landed near St Louis.
Its mail was saved and sent via Marseille on September 19.



Dated Metz 14 Sep - 14th Pharmacists' balloon left September 15 and carried 130 papillons



Carried to Marseille and posted with free frank in the above envelope on September 19

Copyright: France and Colonies Philatelic Society

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The second Metz balloon service was started by British war correspondent George Robinson and French military engineers on September 16, and lasted until October 3. They launched 11 balloons.



Dateline Metz 26 September 1870 by George Robinson - **8th 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

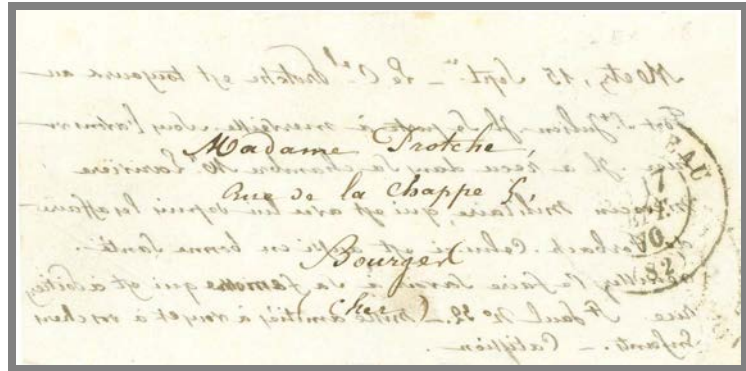
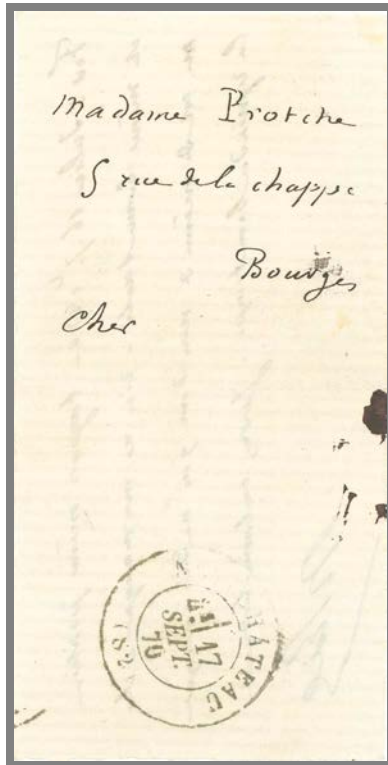
Only *papillon* known from this balloon with arrival markings

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The first Engineers' balloon landed safely near Neufchâteau on September 16 with about 6,000 *papillons*. The mail received September 17 Neufchâteau transit postmarks from the 2nd and 4th collection periods.



1st Engineers' balloon - September 17 Neufchâteau transits

Dateline Fort St Julien 16 7b 1870 from Lt-Colonel Protche (left)

Dateline Metz, 15 Septre from Protche aide (above)

Both *papillons* enclosed in *enveloppe de réexpédition* at Bourges



Papillons placed in *Cabinet du Préfet du Cher* envelope for delivery in Bourges

Prepaid 20 centimes on September 21 and forwarded from Bourges to Libourne

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The 4th Engineers' balloon landed safely near Fresnes-en-Voevre on September 21 with about 30,000 *papillons*. Some mail was processed at Fresnes; most was processed at Tours.



Dated *Metz Sep 21 1870* - 4th Engineers' balloon - **September 22 Fresnes transit postmark**

From George Robinson, inventor of the balloon service - forwarded unpaid to England



Papillon placed in British Post office envelope and marked for 6 pence due - arrived September 30

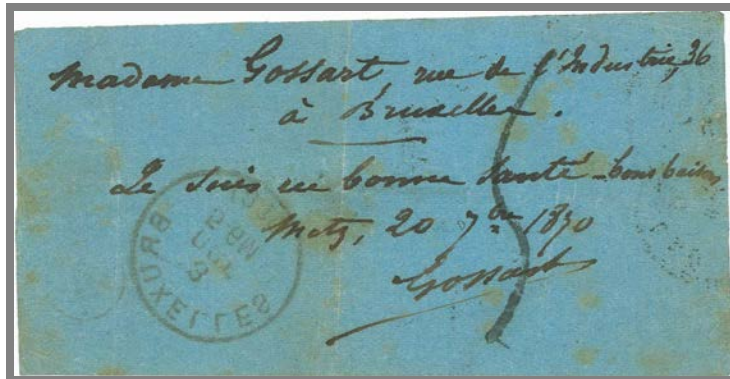
Only two *papillons* are known with September 22 Fresnes postmarks

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

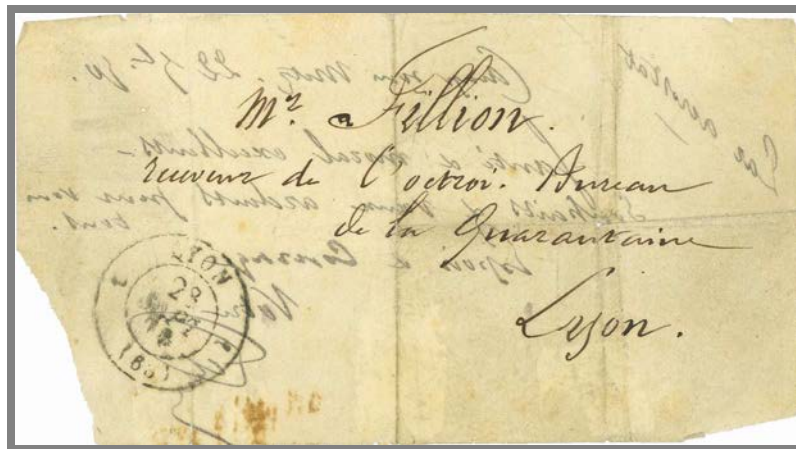
Engineers' Balloon Service

A number of letters from the 4th Engineers' balloon were postmarked on arrival. These were sent through the mails without *enveloppes de réexpédition*.



Dated Metz, 20 7bre 1870 and **addressed to Brussels, Belgium**

Postmarked in Brussels on October 3 and assessed 5 décimes postage due



Dated Camp sous Metz 22 7bre 70 and endorsed *Par aerostat*

Postmarked September 28 upon arrival in Lyon - no postage due

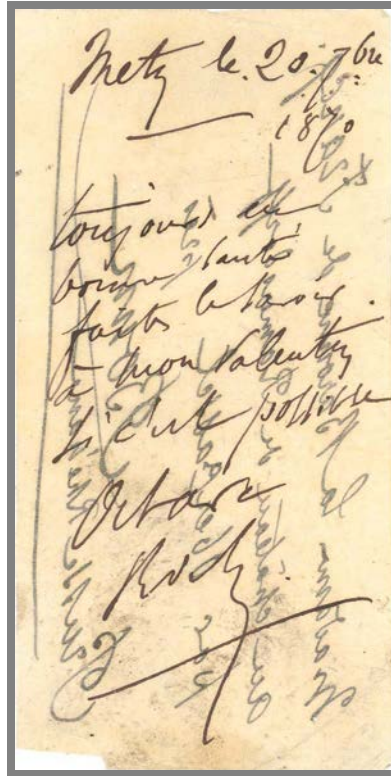
Mail from 4th Engineers balloon processed through Lyon to Tours on September 30

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

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



Dateline Metz le 20 7bre 1870 - 4th Engineers' balloon - **addressed to Obercassel, Prussia**



Papillon placed in *enveloppe de réexpédition* and posted October 2 in Dijon - arrived October 7

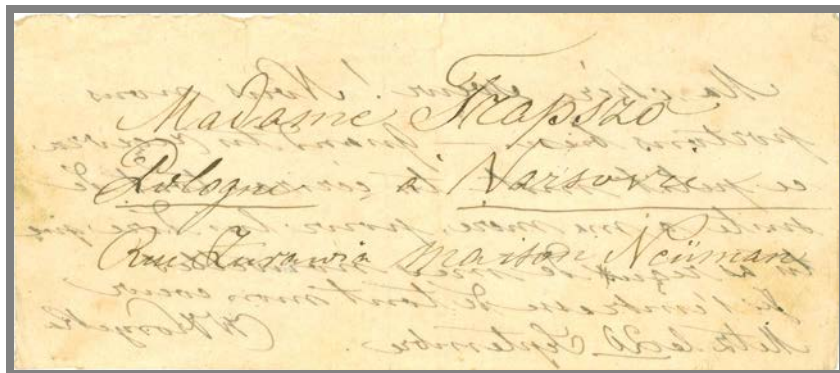
Only two *papillons* are known addressed to Prussia

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

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 *enveloppes de réexpédition* at Dijon.



Dated *Metz le 20 Septembre* - 4th Engineers' balloon - **addressed to Varsovie, Poland**



Papillon placed in *enveloppe de réexpédition* and posted unpaid on October 3 in Dijon

Foreign postage debited per “F.42” tray marking - arrived in Warsaw on October 9

Only three *papillons* are known addressed to Poland

'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
Direction Générale des Finances*

Madame Robinson Melaiide

31 Southport

Lancashire

Angleterre

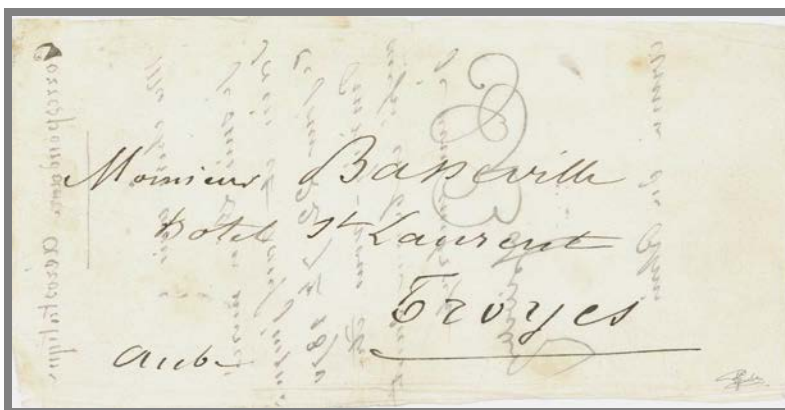


1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

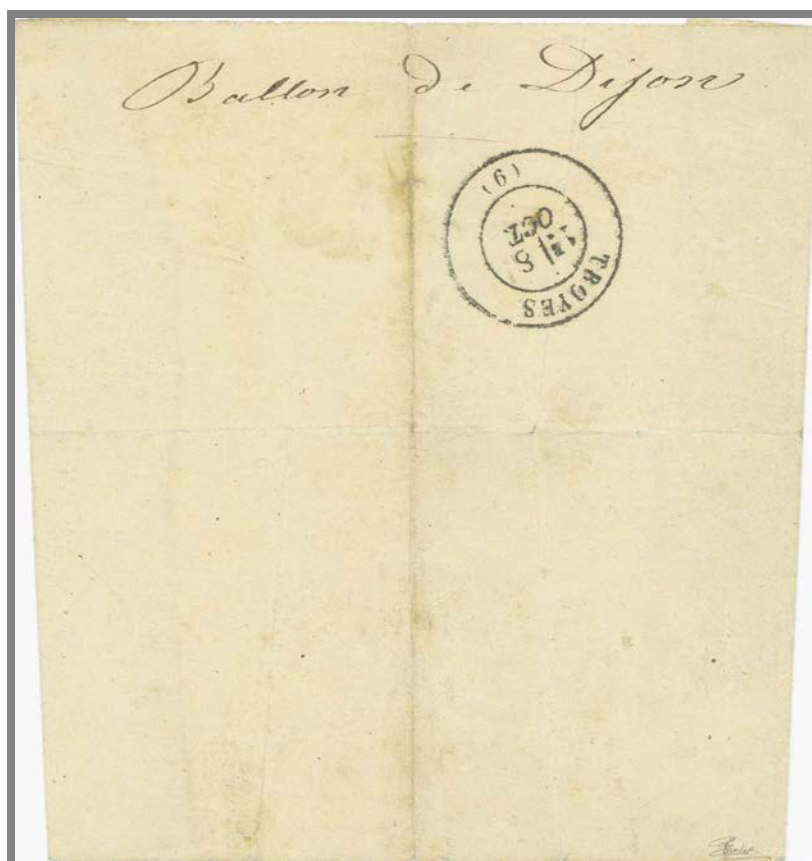
Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The 5th Engineers' balloon landed safely near Dijon on September 23. A few of the *papillons* were placed in forwarding envelopes, and processed postally in transit.



Dateline *Correspondance aérostatique* 22 7bre 1870 - carried by 5th Engineers' balloon



Papillon placed in **envelope endorsed “Ballon de Dijon”** - October 8 Troyes arrival mark

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

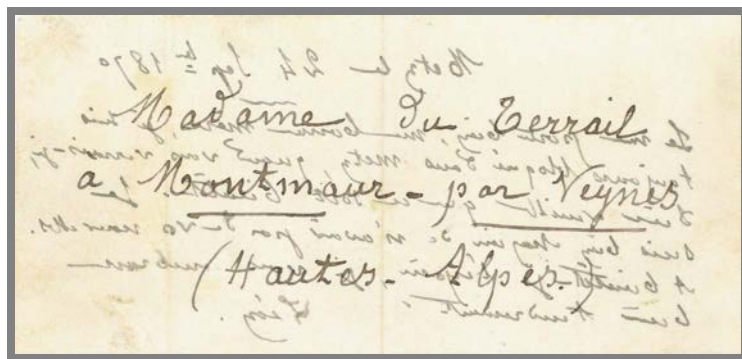
Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The 6th Engineers' balloon left Metz on September 25. Its mail was saved and distributed from the North of France starting on October 2.



Dateline Metz 23rd Septembre 1870 – **addressed to Liverpool, England** with 6d due



Dateline Metz le 24 Sep 1870 - note by recipient showing receipt on October 10

1870 French Campaign in Alsace-Lorraine

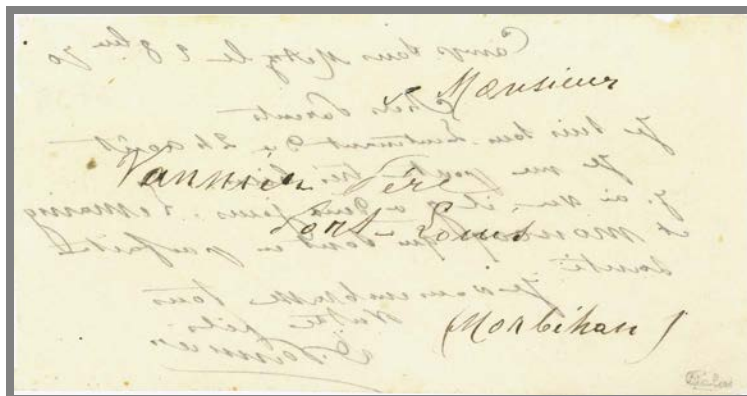
Siege of Metz August 19 – October 27

Engineers' Balloon Service

The Engineers' service was stopped by Marshal Bazaine on October 4 for security reasons.



Dated Metz le 30 septembre 1870 - 10th Engineers' balloon left September 30 and was captured



Dated Camp sous Metz le 2 8bre 70 - 11th and last Engineers' balloon left October 3

Balloon and 12,000 papillons were captured - mail was confiscated by Prussians