



K565.43  
E701

3 27793

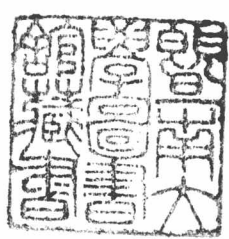
外文书库

历史

# *The Franco-Prussian War*

THE GERMAN INVASION  
OF FRANCE, 1870-1871

MICHAEL HOWARD



RUPERT HART-DAVIS  
SOHO SQUARE LONDON  
1962

© Michael Howard 1961

*First published 1961*

*Second impression 1962*

*Third impression 1962*

*Made and printed in Great Britain by  
William Clowes and Sons, Limited, London and Beccles*

*The Franco-Prussian War*

FOR

*Max Reese*

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

## Preface

IT is doubtful whether any war, the First World War not excepted, has been the object of more concentrated study in proportion to its length and extent than has the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. A bibliography compiled in 1898 could already list 7,000 titles, and the flood was to continue unabated for at least another decade. This is not surprising. In the first place, any event so dramatically catastrophic, occurring as it did in a century of such exceptional international amity as the nineteenth, was bound to attract the attention of a circle of writers, soldiers and historians far wider than those directly involved; and the forty-four years of peace which followed in Western Europe gave plenty of opportunity for detailed and leisurely research. Secondly, a substantial proportion of the literate population both of France and of Germany had, thanks to universal conscription, been directly involved. The educated soldier was no longer an exception in the ranks or in the officers' mess. On each side hundreds of temporary or professional soldiers kept diaries or were to recollect their tempestuous emotions in the tranquillity of their declining years; while leaders civil and military were to show no more restraint than those of our own day in publishing autobiographies making clear the influential or, alternatively, the innocuous role which they themselves had played. In France moreover the flood of invasion, the measures taken to meet it and the drama of the siege of Paris brought war in its most direct form into the lives of the most highly literate people in the world. Finally, in an age when technological change was transforming the nature of war in a manner as unpredictable as that of our own times, the events of 1870 for long provided the only examples which experts could study of the problems which principally perplexed them: the effect of modern weapons on tactics; the organisation and leadership of short-service conscripts; and the maintenance, movement, supply and medical services in the field of armies numbering hundreds of thousands.

The student of the subject therefore finds himself surfeited with material, ranging from analytical staff-studies of technical problems based on official archives to the diaries of French country *curés*, from the memoranda and table-talk of Bismarck to the cartoons of the Paris

press. One man cannot master all this, much less digest it within the bounds of a single volume. Nevertheless a single volume, based on one individual's incomplete studies, may still be found useful, both by scholars and by the public at large; and it is in this hope that I have had the temerity to offer yet another book on what must appear at first sight to be a grotesquely over-studied subject. Only one single-volume study of any scholarly importance has appeared since 1914—that by Emil Daniels, published in 1929 as the sixth volume of Hans Delbrück's *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*. Apart from the monumental work of General Palat, referred to below, this appears to be the only general history of the war to make use of the French documents whose publication by the Section Historique of the French General Staff between 1901 and 1913 rendered all previous studies out of date. The publication in full of the War Diary of the Emperor Frederick III in 1926 also gave new opportunities to the historian, of which so far only Dr Daniels has taken full advantage. And since 1929 yet further material has become available: in particular the definitive edition of Bismarck's works; Professor H. O. Meissner's edition of the diaries and letters of Grand Duke Frederick of Baden; and finally, most revealing of all, the secret war diaries of Colonel Bronsart von Schellendorf, which were published in Bonn in 1954. All this, together with the unfortunate fact that Dr Daniel's excellent work is almost unobtainable in this country, may make the present volume a little more acceptable to historians than the formidable catalogue of its august predecessors, from Lecomte's four volumes to Palat's fifteen, may at first suggest. But throughout this work I have been conscious how my path has been smoothed by these scholars of the past, and by General Palat chief among them. The lucidity, the scholarship, the eloquence and the passion of his volumes set a standard which no successor can hope to equal; and there is hardly a page which follows which does not owe an unacknowledged debt to his learning.

Not only the work of predecessors but the encouragement, co-operation or forbearance of contemporaries has made this book possible. Dr Werner Hahlweg of the University of Munster advised me on German sources. General de Cossé-Brissac, Head of the Service Historique de l'Etat-Major at Vincennes, M. Lemôine, Librarian of the École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, Brigadier J. Stephenson O.B.E., Librarian of the Royal United Services Institution, Mr King, Librarian of the War Office, have all been consistently helpful, as have the officials of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the British Museum and the

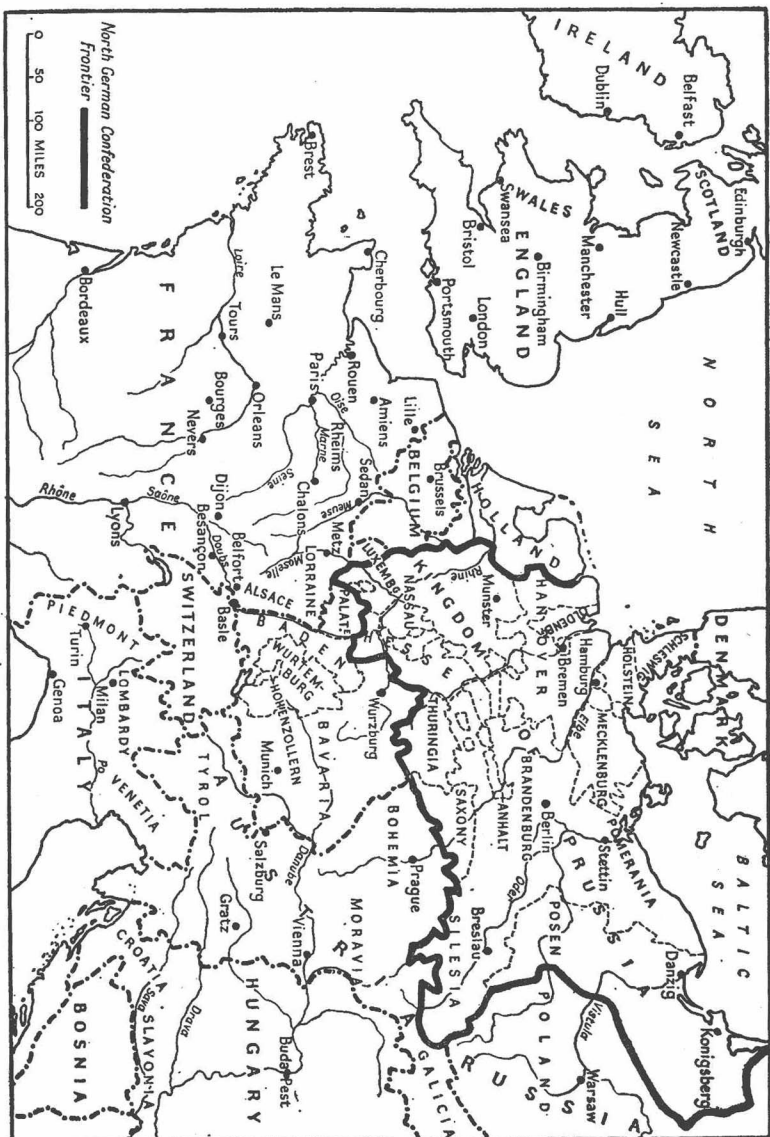
London Library. The University of London provided a travel grant from its Central Research Fund. Mrs J. H. Naylor made invaluable transcriptions for me in the Archives at Vincennes. Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, Mr A. Marx, Mr C. H. D. Howard, Mr M. R. D. Foot, Mr Peter Paret and Mr J. H. Naylor read the work at various stages of its composition and saved me from an alarming number of solecisms and errors; though not, alas, from those which still remain. Mr Michael Clark of King's College, London, conducted me over the battlefields with patience and discernment; Miss P. McCallum compiled the Index; and but for the help of Mr Mark James it is doubtful whether the book could have appeared at all. To all these and to many others I am deeply indebted; and regret only that I have not produced a work of scholarship more worthy of their help.

*King's College, London*  
*March 1961*

MICHAEL HOWARD



# *The Franco-Prussian War*



Map 1: Europe in 1870

## Abbreviations Used in Footnotes

- D.O.** *Enquête parlementaire sur les Actes du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale: Dépêches télégraphiques officielles* (Versailles 1875).
- D.T.** *Enquête parlementaire sur les Actes du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale: Dépositions des témoins* (Versailles 1873).
- G.G.S.** *The Franco-German War 1870-1871* (London 1874-84).  
Translated from: *Der deutsch-französische Krieg 1870-71. Redigirt von der kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung des Gross Generalstabes* (Berlin 1872-81).
- Guerre** *La Guerre de 1870-71, publiée par la Revue d'Histoire, rédigée à la Section historique de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée* (Paris 1901-13).
- M.M.K.** *Moltkes Militärische Korrespondenz. Aus den Dienstschriften des Krieges 1870-71* (Berlin 1897).
- Reinach** *Dépêches, Circulaires, Décrets, Proclamations et Discours de Léon Gambetta. Publiés par M. Joseph Reinach* (Paris 1886-91).

# *Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	xi
----------------	----

## CHAPTER I: THE ANTAGONISTS

1 The Technical Background	1
2 The Unreformed Armies	8
3 The Reform of the Prussian Army	18
4 The Reform of the French Army	29

## CHAPTER II: THE OUTBREAK

1 The War Plans	40
2 The Hohenzollern Candidature	48
3 The German Mobilisation	57
4 The French Mobilisation	63

## CHAPTER III: THE FIRST DISASTERS

1 The Concentration of the Armies	77
2 Spicheren	85
3 Froeschwiller	99

## CHAPTER IV: THE ARMY OF THE RHINE

1 The Invasion	120
2 Vionville-Mars-la-Tour	144
3 Gravelotte-St Privat	167

## CHAPTER V: THE ARMY OF CHÂLONS

1 Beaumont	183
2 Sedan	203

## CHAPTER VI: THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

1 Ferrières	224
2 The Nation in Arms	233
3 The Francs-Tireurs	249

CHAPTER VII: METZ AND STRASBOURG	257
CHAPTER VIII: THE BATTLES FOR ORLÉANS	
1 Coulmiers	284
2 Beaune-la-Rolande	299
3 Loigny	310
CHAPTER IX: THE SIEGE OF PARIS	
1 The Investment	317
2 Le Plan Trochu	331
3 Versailles	347
4 The Bombardment	357
CHAPTER X: GUERRE À OUTRANCE	
1 The Deepening Conflict	371
2 Chanzu	381
3 Faidherbe	388
4 The End in the West	397
5 Bourbaki	407
CHAPTER XI: THE PEACE	432
<i>Notes on Sources</i>	457
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	459
<i>Index</i>	474

## *Maps*

1	<i>Europe in 1870</i>	xvi
2	<i>Lorraine and the Palatinate</i>	72
3	<i>Spicheren and Saarbrücken</i>	86
4	<i>Froeschwiller</i>	104
5	<i>The Moselle Valley round Metz</i>	130
6	<i>The Fortress of Metz</i>	138
7	<i>Vionville-Mars-la-Tour</i>	150
8	<i>Gravelotte-St Privat</i>	166
9	<i>The Marne, the Meuse and the Moselle</i>	184
10	<i>The Valley of the Meuse</i>	194
11	<i>The Battle of Beaumont</i>	200
12	<i>Sedan</i>	204
13	<i>The Campaign of the Loire</i>	286
14	<i>The Siege of Paris</i>	316
15	<i>The Campaign in the North</i>	390
16	<i>The Campaign in the East</i>	408
17	<i>The Theatre of War, 1870-71</i>	end

## CHAPTER I

### *The Antagonists*

#### §1 The Technical Background

IN THE summer of 1870 the kingdom of Prussia and her German allies totally destroyed the military power of Imperial France. For nearly eighty years the defeated nation had given the law in military matters to Europe, whereas the victor, ten years earlier, had been the least of the continent's major military powers. Within a month Prussia established a military pre-eminence and a political hegemony which made the unification of Germany under her leadership a matter of course, and which only an alliance embracing nearly every major power in the world was to wrest from her half a century later.

There was little precedent in the history of Europe for so dramatic a reversal. To find one we must go back at least to the campaign of Breitenfeld in 1631 when within a few weeks Gustavus Adolphus broke the supremacy of the Catholic powers; and Gustavus had fought for years against the Danes, Poles, and Russians with an accumulating success which already marked him out as one of the great captains of history. In 1870 the Prussian army had to its credit the brilliant campaign of 1866 against Austria, but this was only one in the long series of defeats which the Hapsburgs had suffered at the hands of Prussia and France since the days of Eugene of Savoy. The completeness of the Prussian success in 1870 thus astounded the world. The incompetence of the French high command explained much: but the basic reasons for the catastrophe lay deeper, as the French themselves, in their humiliation, were to discern. The collapse at Sedan, like that of the Prussians at Jena sixty-four years earlier, was the result not simply of faulty command but of a faulty military system; and the military system of a nation is not an independent section of the social system but an aspect of it in its totality. The French had good reason to look on their disasters as a judgment. The social and economic developments of the past fifty years had brought about a military as well as an industrial revolution. The Prussians had kept abreast of it and France had not. Therein lay the basic cause of her defeat.

The military implications of the industrial changes and scientific discoveries which were transforming the world were little explored during the first half of the nineteenth century. Conservative War Ministries and parsimonious Treasuries allowed projects of every kind to collect dust in pigeon-holes or to be frittered away in endless experiment. This indolence was disturbed only by the change which occurred in the relations between the Great Powers in the 1850s. The Crimea showed that major war was still possible, and the growth of nationalist movements with the active encouragement of a new French Empire made it seem likely. Throughout Europe military writing began to multiply. The wars of the first Napoleon provided an inexhaustible field for study, and the principles which such authorities as Jomini, Willisen, Clausewitz and Rüstow derived from them provided the broad foundations for a theory of war equally valid for all ages. But two major technical questions were entirely open to speculation. How would the new means of communication—railways and the electric telegraph—affect strategy? And how would the development of breech-loading rifled firearms affect tactics?

The significance of railways for military operations had been discerned as soon as they were developed, in the 1830s. German writers were particularly alert to their possibilities, at a moment when a weak German Confederation once again seemed to lie at the mercy of a revived and ambitious France.<sup>1</sup> Some of them, notably Friedrich List, saw even deeper implications in the new form of transport. Hitherto, lying in the centre of Europe, Germany had been at the mercy of her more powerful and united neighbours. Railways would not only give her a new economic unity; they would transform her central position into an asset, enabling her to concentrate her forces rapidly at any point on her frontier to repel invasion.<sup>2</sup> It was in railways, therefore, that the real strength of national defence lay. "Every new development of railways", wrote Helmuth von Moltke, "is a military advantage; and for the national defence a few million on the completion of our railways is far more profitably employed than on our new fortresses."<sup>3</sup> Opinion in France and Austria was equally impressed by the military advantages

<sup>1</sup> Especially Friedrich Harkort, *Die Eisenbahnen von Minden nach Köln* (1833). See A. E. Pratt, *The Rise of Rail Power in War and Conquest* (London 1915) 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich List, *Schriften, Reden, Briefe* (Berlin 1931-5) III i 155-270. See E. M. Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton 1941) 148-52.

<sup>3</sup> "Welche Rücksichten kommen bei der Wahl der Richtung von Eisenbahnen in Betracht?" in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, 1843. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften des Grafen Helmuth von Moltke* (Berlin 1892) II 229.



of railway development and the military dangers offered by the advances of their neighbours. In 1842 alarmed French publicists urged the construction of a line from Paris to Strasbourg to counter the convergence of German lines on the Rhine; and even the British grew alarmed at the possibilities of a sudden French concentration on the Channel ports. In the campaign of 1859 the French and Hapsburg Empires, using railways, moved troops into Italy within a fortnight, which would have taken sixty days to march over the same distance. It was clear that the railway age would open a new chapter in the history of warfare.

Speed of concentration was only one of the advantages which railways provided. They carried troops rapidly to the theatre of war; and they enabled them to arrive in good physical condition, not wearied and decimated by weeks of marching. Armies needed no longer to consist of hardened regular troops; reservists from civil life could be embodied in the force as well, although the incidence of sickness and exhaustion in the combat area itself was consequently increased. Further, the problem of supplying large forces in the field was simplified. Military movements had hitherto been dictated by the necessity of living off the country, or from laboriously accumulated magazines: now, if the railway lines were intact, the trains smoothly organised, and supply from the railhead unhampered, armies could keep the field so long as there was blood and treasure in the nation to support them—and of this power of endurance the American Civil War provided the first great example. Supplies and reinforcements could come daily from home and the wounded could be quickly evacuated to base hospitals. With the burden of their supply-columns lightened, armies could be more mobile and their members more lightly equipped. Moreover, the distinction between army and nation was dissolved. No longer was the battle-area remote. Newspaper-correspondents could travel to and fro, sending back their reports by telegraph. Troops could come and go on leave. The wounded could be cared for and entertained at home. The nation at war thus became an armed camp—sometimes a besieged fortress—in which every individual felt himself involved in a mighty communal endeavour. In 1870 there dawned in Europe an age of “absolute war” in a sense which even Clausewitz had never conceived.

Finally, the development of railways gave an entirely new aspect to the fundamental principle of Napoleonic strategy—the concentration of overwhelming forces at the decisive point. This concentration could no longer be effected by movement of armies in the field: it was a matter of elaborate organisation which had to be undertaken long before the war