The French military during 1870,: in light of the tradition and strategy of Napoleon Bonaparte.

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THE FRENCH MILITARY DURING 1870
IN LIGHT OF THE TRADITION AND STRATEGY OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

by

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Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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May, 1964
In the preparation of this paper, I am indebted to my wife, Barbara, for her patience and assistance and to Paul A. Gagnon, whose guidance and suggestions were indispensable for the completion of this thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

This paper is in no way meant to be a comparative study of the two Napoleons. The methods and strategies of Napoleon I are given merely as background material to 1870. Napoleon I was not perfect in his use of the tools and techniques of his profession, particularly during the later campaigns. Yet the fact remains that Bonaparte probably possessed one of the most outstanding military minds in history and used it to help France reach her pinnacle of power in Europe during the early 19th century. The question to be answered is how this same nation could be so quickly and thoroughly beaten a little more than fifty years later, in 1870. One of the obvious answers seems to be that France in 1870 lacked a military leader of the stature of Napoleon Bonaparte. But other questions arise. For example, given the lack of an outstanding military leader in 1870, what had happened to the military formula with which Napoleon I had successfully dominated Europe? During the preceding years, how had the French leaders built and advanced the Napoleonic tradition and strategy? In addition, it is necessary to take at least a surface look at their opponents, the Prussian military. How had the Prussian leaders been affected by their defeats in 1806 at the hands of Napoleon I? Had it been these defeats that encouraged the Prussian leaders to develop new tactics which they were to use against the French in 1870?

These, then, are a few of the aspects which must be considered in a historical analysis of the reasons for the fail-
ure of the French military in 1870.
NAPOLEONIC ARMIES

The most distant cause of the French defeat in 1870 probably occurred in 1806. Not only had Napoleon I encouraged the growth of German nationalism with his policy toward the Germanic states, but he had showed the German leaders, particularly the Prussians, the methods which were necessary to continue national sovereignty. Throughout the early Napoleonic Era, Prussia, under Frederick William III, had successfully kept its neutrality; but when in 1806 it was discovered that an aggressive Napoleon I had other plans for the Prussian state, making it a satellite in reality, friction between the two powers resulted in war.

At this time the Prussian army was a perfect example of how 18th century armies trained and organized. The organization of the Prussian army was based on the well-disciplined, long-serving soldier led by army officers who in many cases had strong faith in a defensive style of fighting. This Prussian army in 1806 opposed a French national army which, on the whole, was led by those having patriotic feelings and an officer corps which believed in quick, thrusting offenses. Napoleon used the technique of the sudden stroke into the enemy's weak area, which he had previously perfected in Italy and Austria against the Prussians in 1806.

In general, the excessive emphasis on one type of strategy has often proven disastrous. This was the case of the Prussian leaders in 1806, when they failed to remain flexible enough to alter their plans to fit the changing conditions of the various situations they faced. Prince Louis at Saalfeld, and Tauentzien near Jena, both made defeat inevitable because they insisted on imitating the oblique order of battle of Frederick the Great. The Prussians at this time did not consider numerical superiority a prerequisite for victory while Napoleon had earlier used the principle of superiority of numbers very successfully and thus had great faith in it. At Jena, October 14, 1806, Prince Hohenlohe mistakenly decided to oppose Bonaparte's 65,000 men with his army of 35,000. Almost complete destruction resulted and the Prince could no longer be considered in command of a fighting force.

In 1807 a treaty was signed between Napoleon and Prussia in which the latter became a virtual satellite. Prussia, as a result, lost half of its territory, had to pay a huge indemnity, had to pay for the occupation of French troops.

2. Oblique movement into battle means that the attacking force moves in a direction that is diagonal to its column movement, thereby making the point between its flank and front its first assault element.

and was forced to limit its military forces to 43,000 men.

The period from 1806 to the French retreat from Russia in 1812 gave many of the Prussian leaders the time to re-examine their defeat of 1806. These leaders eventually got the conservative William III to agree to certain social and political reforms. These reforms, first led by Stein and later by Hardenberg, abolished feudalism and led to much greater social mobility. They also resulted in a reorganization of the army along lines similar to the French army. This reorganization resulted in universal conscription and the lessening of the extreme use of discipline. A national militia, the Landwehr, which allowed the Prussians to put over 200,000 troops in the field to oppose Napoleon I at a later date, was also created in 1813. Even though Napoleon had limited the Prussian army to 43,000 men, the Prussian leaders, led by Scharnhorst, were able to circumvent this ruling by replacing the entire 43,000 men with an entirely new army each time the first group had successfully completed the minimum requirements of training.


5. Landwehr literally means "landguard" and was made up basically of most men who had served in the army and reserve and were still under 45 years old.


7. Schevill, Europe. p. 442.
Not all the credit should be given to Napoleon for his frequent victories because he often benefited from the errors and mistakes of his opponents. Similar to the Prussian mistake at Jena in 1806, was the Austrian failure in 1809 to reinforce their troops after the battle of Aspern. Since the Austrians could have brought three times as many reinforcements into the field as Napoleon did during this interval period, their failure to do so proved a great disadvantage during the battle that followed at Wagram.

In both the battles of Ratisbonne and Wagram, Bonaparte vigorously attacked with his right wing, leaving his left wing to hold a defensive position. Although Archduke Charles of Austria used the same tactics, he lacked the stubbornness and vitality of Napoleon’s forces, and thus the few units which gained their objectives were nothing when compared to the decisive victories of Napoleon’s right wing. During the battle of Wagram the Austrians attacked Bonaparte’s weak left flank with the majority of their forces. Meanwhile his right wing successfully defeated and turned the Austrian left flank. With strong reserves to the rear, he prevented the Austrian successes on his left side from hindering his total victory by his right wing at Rossbach. Later he combined his forces to re-take Aderklaa, which had been lost by his left flank.

Napoleon I's plan for a march into Russia in 1812 might seem imprudent on the surface, but this was not the case. His plan for defeating the Russian armies and finally occupying their capital of Moscow would, he believed, ultimately force the Emperor Alexander to sign a peace treaty. This had proven to be the case with the Prussians after the battle of Friedland in 1807, and again with the Austrian Emperor Francis after the battle of Austerlitz in 1805, and later after the battle of Wagram in 1809. Although Napoleon knew the chance he was about to take might lead to a strategic defeat, he was fully aware of the precedent that had been established and, therefore, took the gamble he felt necessary. Napoleon's character and previous actions could have offered enough foreshadowing reasons why he might have accepted this favorable gamble.

This calculated risk resulted in Napoleon's defeat in Russia and in addition after 1812 the allies, not including Russia, could put approximately 725,000 troops in the field to oppose Napoleon. France at any time during the First Empire did not have that number of troops under arms. By late 1812 only one-third of Napoleon's troops were French, while the majority had been recruited from the 10 countries he had occupied.

During most of Napoleon's marches, with the major exception of the march to Russia in 1812, his troops seldom suffered from lack of provisions, since they would often, as in the march from the Adige to the Lower Danube, take whatever they needed from the countryside.

Besides relying on the ability of his troops to find provisions, Napoleon depended upon his advance guard a great deal. Since he needed to alter his tactics from time to time, it was necessary for the advance guard to provide the information needed. Aside from this, Bonaparte made the maximum use of his advance guard to keep communications open among his many units. His use of cavalry in this manner was quite extensive, but he seems to have depended a great deal more on having greater numbers of infantrymen rather than cavalrymen, for ultimate victory in battle. Once his cavalry had been started into the attack they could not be maneuvered and usually became wasted after attacking for more than 1500 yards.

On the other side, Napoleon often used his artillery whenever possible. His success at massing and concentrating his artillery often depended upon the type of terrain and the accuracy of his shells at a range of about 300 yards.

12. Ibid., pp. 21, and 42-43.
13. Ibid., p. 22.
During the era of Napoleon I the movement of artillery to a more desirable position would often depend on the firmness of the earth, thereby allowing the field pieces to be moved into position. For this reason Napoleon was unable to break through the British lines at Waterloo.

Bonaparte frequently waited for the course of a battle to develop before he committed his artillery. In this way he could move the massed pieces to the desired location with the result that the artillery then became the decisive factor of the battle. The opposite of this tactic was the combination of massed concentrated artillery that Napoleon used to stop or hinder the advance of an enemy by a heavy bombardment, thereby giving his troops the time to decide the right opportunity for victory. The allied leaders were sometimes slow to learn from the old master, but in the battle of Leipzig when their massed guns surprised Napoleon by opening fire, he commented, "At last they have learned something."

It becomes obvious that Napoleon, during his later campaigns, lost much of the zest and detailed precision that he had earlier shown. At this time he began to rely more on his own ability to master his opponents. At Kulm, in August 1813, he ordered Vandamme's column, unsupported, to cut off


the retreat of the Prussians and Austrians from Dresden. The French column was destroyed because Napoleon had forgotten about it.

It seems that after 1806 Napoleon I used his imperial position to guarantee his greater numbers on the battlefield. This reliance on numerical superiority resulted in his emphasis on the sheer weight of his forces rather than using the surprise and mobility he had used earlier. This tactic can be observed when he later emphasizes concentrated artillery fire to soften a point in his adversary's defenses before he launched his attack. His final defeat may have been caused by his failure to be frugal with his superior numbers, and his failure to make use of surprise and mobility. Bonaparte's strategy of attacking an enemy's weak spot had been established much earlier, but Napoleon's later dependence on the massing of enough troops to make a weak spot in his opponent's defensive line was a corruption of this military principle. The real power of concentrating a force at an enemy's weak point lies in the use of a flexible policy of mobility and not merely in the density of one's troops. The loss of this flexibility on the part of Napoleon I has been greatly overlooked and hidden by what later grew to be the Napoleonic legend.


The Prussians during the battles of Lutzen and Bautzen in 1813 put into the field a well-disciplined army of 150,000. After these engagements Napoleon considered the Prussian troops his most dangerous rivals and by the importance their role played in his defeat at Leipzig it would seem that his prophecy was well founded.

Yet when the Prussian and Russian armies met Napoleon at the battles of Lutzen and Bautzen in May, 1813, he successfully won both engagements because of his own great military prowess. The fact remained, however, that he fully realized that these defeats were in no way similar to the crushing defeats of Jena and Friedland. The opposing forces retreated in an orderly fashion and Napoleon commented that with the great losses of the French, a few more victories like those would mean ultimate defeat for France.

Thus, we have seen the very game of numbers that Napoleon had played so well previously, later being used against him. The Prussians had learned their lessons well, and even though there was a short period of Prussian reversal back to the old tradition of a professional army, Prussia was again to apply what it had learned at a later date, to its advantage. In view of the German developments after 1806 it is interesting

that the French, the first to use national armies in Europe, fell back in 1870 to a complete reliance on the very thing the Prussians found necessary to replace in 1806, the long service soldiers of a professional army.

This lesson of Napoleon I, which had been so quickly absorbed by the Prussians in 1807, in general, was refuted by many of the leading French military minds during the 1860's. One of the foremost French strategists of this period, Ardant du Picq, was quoted as saying, "In these days of perfected long arms of destruction, a small force... by a happy combination of good sense or genius with morale or appliances, may secure heroic victories over a great force similarly armed. What good is an army of two hundred thousand men of whom only one half really fight, while the other one hundred thousand disappear in a hundred ways?"

To even the most casual reader it becomes evident that if this view represented that of a sizable element of the French military leadership in the 1860's, which it did, the conclusion could only be that they had not benefited from their own historical experiences. The following material will consider why both the French and the Prussians either adopted, or failed to adopt, not only universal conscription, but also various other technological and organizational developments within their military organizations.

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Changes from Napoleon I to 1870
Changes in Prussia

It is incorrect to think that Prussia merely imitated the military institutions of Napoleon I since, in reality, they superimposed their existing military tradition on the Napoleonic system. Unlike the French during the years that followed Napoleon Bonaparte, the Prussians after 1860 did not allow the hiring of a substitute to take one's place in the army. They thus established the foundation of their army upon the concept of true universal conscription.

Between 1815 and 1860 the law of universal conscription was not stringently enforced in Prussia, but when William I came to power he saw the future necessity of war if Prussia was to unite the various Germanic states. Because of this William enlarged the yearly draft from 40,000 to 60,000 men while stipulating that the minimum active service would last for three years. After each soldier had served his active time, he was expected to serve an additional two years in the reserve. William I and Albrecht von Roon, Minister of War, supported an increase in this reserve status to four years, thus guaranteeing a Prussian army of 400,000 men. The lower house of the Prussian Diet refused to support these military reforms either financially or legislatively.


Despite this resistance, Bismarck and von Roon, through devious methods, went about reforming the military areas they considered important while terrorizing many of the Liberals in the parliament. This is just opposite of what occurred in France, when during the 1860's the heads of government gave concessions to the Liberals in the area of military reform. With the support of William, Bismarck and von Roon in Prussia continued their plan of strengthening the army in complete defiance of the lower house. The final step in these developments took place when General von Moltke, one of the most scientific military minds of the 19th century, took command of the Prussian army.

As with all other types of machines, the military organization must periodically be overhauled to adjust to various new developments. The armies of Frederick the Great were found to be obsolete at Jena, and so too was Scharnhorst's organization during the mobilizations of 1848 and 1859. Moltke helped to successfully bring about various needed reforms in 1860, by making universal conscription the duty of the entire nation. After the war against Austria in 1866, all of the States in the Northern German Confederation with Bavaria and Wurtemburg, adopted the Prussian military system and thus set the basis for the standardization of one German army. Thus the Prussian army stood ready; a large, well-oiled, machine ready to lunge forward at the command of its masters.

At the start of the war in 1870, the Prussian general staff, supporting the views of Moltke, intended, as much as possible, to limit both Bismarck's and von Roon's control over the military movements during the conflict. Bismarck was not even told of the German military plans after the fall of Sedan. As a result, Bismarck later complained that the Prussian military movements frequently hindered his diplomatic dealings with the French. Moltke believed that there was no reason why his military operations should be interrupted by diplomatic considerations. The days were gone when Napoleon I's military officers were also "general-diplomats", who received detailed accounts of military information.

Napoleon I had felt, when at all possible during times of peace, as many military officers as possible should gain combat experience with foreign armies. No matter how many officers gained this experience those who did would prove to be an asset in future campaigns. This was not thought necessary in France during the Second Empire since its own foreign wars provided a means for French officers to gain war experiences. On the other hand, Prussia used this Napoleonic principle by

sending many of its officers, including von Moltke, to Turkey and Syria, while von Goeben went to Spain to gain the practical experiences of war. By 1870 these experiences proved to be a limiting factor to the French tactics and style of fighting, while having the opposite effect on the Prussians and causing them to greatly advance their thinking in military strategy.

Von Moltke, the Prussian commander, might be considered the next military genius to come upon the European scene after Napoleon I. There were many more similarities between Moltke and Napoleon I than had ever existed between Napoleon III and his uncle. Although Moltke never wrote of military strategy as such, his brilliance was based on his search for new developments in modern warfare. It was left for Moltke to develop strategic timing as a newly formulated concept; a systematical use of railroads for military use, the use of the telegraph in war, a superior training system that emphasized the reliance on subordinate officers, and, finally, the advantages of envelopment and concentric advance while using increased range and ease of troop movement. Napoleon I would probably have had some difficulty in developing the emphasis on subordinate officers; but the rest of Moltke's developments were often the logical outcome of Bonaparte's


views which concerned the bringing of a large part of his force to bear upon only the minor force of his opponent, and by massing the troops in a location in which they could be quickly brought to bear in important positions on the battlefield.

The Prussians had also started the development of a general staff to work out geographical problems even before 1806. After their defeat at Jena, Scharnhorst led the reform that added supporting troops to this administrative agency. During the period between the 1820's and the late 1840's, the control of this staff remained in the hands of the minister of war. Only under von Moltke did the full possibilities of the general staff develop completely, culminating finally with the separation of direct power of the war ministry from the general staff. This division was not entirely due to the brilliance of von Moltke, but was due primarily to the fact that most Prussians realized the importance of a centralized organization which could direct the new technological innovations in times of stress; that is, use of railroads, and movement of artillery. When von Moltke took command in 1857 he started to make detailed plans as to how railroads could be used to their best advantage in times of war. Through the structure of the general staff

he organized a railroad system by 1867 that was entirely independent of the regular system and could be used for any purpose desired by the general staff.

The Prussian general staff, like Napoleon Bonaparte, realized the importance of rifle power. Napoleon I had established the principle: "The firearm is everything, the rest is nothing." This comment summed up the Prussian attitude toward rifle practice. The military leaders tried to train the individual Prussian soldier so well in rifle practice that, when he found himself under battlefield conditions, he would not make some of the glaring errors that had been made formerly, such as not even aiming at an enemy assault force before firing.

The Prussian general staff planned the war with France in great detail, yet the plan remained, to a large extent, as flexible as possible due to the strong belief in change by von Moltke. Von Moltke's plan, as was agreed to by the King, was, above all things, based on a quick capture of the French capital, which he considered to be more important in France than in most other countries. While the Prussian troops were to drive the French forces toward Paris, they were also to try to keep the French forces out of the fertile southern states, while limiting them to a narrow tract in the north as much as possible.

The general theme of the German plan was based on the resolution to attack the French at once, wherever they were found, while trying to keep the German troops as completely compact as possible so that the Prussians could always bring a superior force into the field. These general plans were usually left to the various commanders for decisions of the hour. The most thorough part of the plan concerned the Prussian advancement up to and through the French frontiers.

Moltke considered it a mistake to make any war plans detailed on isolated points and then lay them away for any length of time. He believed that the first meeting of the two armies would change any preconceived plans, and therefore all action had to be based on the problems of the times. As the situations developed he believed that some things previously planned would become impracticable, while others, though previously impossible, might become possible. As a result, Moltke thought that the best he could do was to weigh the facts and decide what was best for an unknown period.

RAILWAYS USED IN THE CAMPAIGN OF 1870.

Showing the lines of railway used by the French and Germans in 1870-71, and also the passes of the Vosges.

Harburg
The French entered the war in 1870 with a railway system which had been established between 1851 and 1855. The only dealings that the military had had with the railroad companies concerned financial matters. No plans had been made for a system which would transport large numbers of troops and supplies during war.

In 1869, General Niel appointed a commission to consider possible reform of the rules that regulated railway transportation for the military. The commission, made up of both civilian and military personnel, designed a plan for the coordination of the military and railway transportation that was very similar to the German system of military rail movement. Primarily due to the death of Niel, the plan was virtually forgotten. Consequently, the French entered the war in 1870 with a military transport system that had been founded in 1855 and had already proven inadequate by 1859. During the Italian war.

A great deal of the chaos which resulted in 1870 was due to the antiquated rules which had never been changed since they had first been initiated in 1851 and 1855. For example, one of the 1855 rules had stated that, "Officers were responsible for the prescribed movements in connection


32. Ibid., p. 139.
with the entraining, and should personally co-operate in ensuring observance of the regulation referring thereto, but the fact was that many officers refused even to consider this regulation as an aspect of their duties and regarded it as the responsibility of the railroad officials.

Even the great Prussian victory at Sadowa in 1866 did not stir the French to reform and in fact it had the wrong effect on the French public in general; their sole concern was to show Prussia that France was still supreme in Europe. After the impressive Prussian military victory at Sadowa, a few of the French military leaders began to realize that Prussia was considerably more than the perfect paper army it had been considered previously. The alarm shown by a few military leaders, however, still failed to arouse the majority of the French military authorities and the public in general. The French General Trochu, in his writings, showed that he had changed his opinion of the Prussian army after Sadowa, but even his personal letters to the Emperor failed to stir any reforms within the French army. Both the French military attaché in Berlin and General Ducrot in Strasbourg, warned the French heads of government of the huge number of reserves, the good equipment, and the

33. Ibid., p. 141. Napoleon I not only looked for new strategic developments, but one of the major facets of his military genius was his quick movement of troops to an opponent's weakness. Therefore, it is quite improbable that during his early campaigns Napoleon could not have foreseen the great possibilities of railroads during periods of war. If nothing else, Napoleon I certainly would have learned the necessity of reform after the Italian lesson of 1859.
excellent military organization of the Prussian army. These continual warnings fell upon deaf ears, and the only response from the general public, which was the only element who could have forced action to balance these inequalities, was an attitude of indifference.

One of the few changes that did occur in the French army as a direct result of the Prussian victory in 1866 was a greater emphasis on a new type of gun called the "chassepot". This weapon, in many cases, was even superior to the Prussian "needle gun" which was breech loading and had showed its complete supremacy over the Austrian muzzle-loaders. Both rifles allowed the soldiers to load them in any position and could have had an even greater effect on the tactics of both the French and Prussian military leaders if these groups had not been so hesitant to abandon the old methods. In addition, despite the superiority of their weapon, the French failed to take advantage of this fact by not teaching their troops how to effectively use these new arms. These facts, combined with an exaggerated lack of mobility, greatly hurt the chances of a French military victory in 1870.


Because the Prussian breechloading artillery pieces were accepted as being far better than the French muzzleloading cannons, the French tried to counter-balance this advantage with the use of a new weapon called the "mitrailleuse". This weapon, a forerunner of the modern machine gun, had thirty-seven barrels that fired simultaneously. Due to the French fear that the new weapon might fall into Prussian hands, only a small group of French officers were actually acquainted with its function and possible use. The result was that very few of these guns had been manufactured by 1870 and, as a result, they had little influence on military strategy. The few "mitrailleuses" which were in use during the fighting of 1870 were usually used as field cannons rather than as infantry weapons which, if they had been used correctly by the French, could have brought direct fire superiority to bear at close range.

The use of artillery to provide the best possible advantage had been a French tradition established during the campaigns of the first Napoleon. During the war of 1870, however, the artillery seemed, as did some of the other arms of the French military, to rest more upon its past history and tradition than upon its developing precision. Not only were

the guns themselves imperfect weapons, but target practice had been badly neglected. These two facts, combined with the third fact that the French lacked a competent artillery commander who could gain maximum effectiveness by maneuvering for greater concentration of fire power, left the French at a distinct disadvantage within the area of artillery. Not only could the Prussian field pieces fire farther, but they were also more numerous than the French cannons. On the other hand, the French artillery, had the good qualities of quickly coming into position and commencing to fire very early. These facts were negligible in 1870 because the French artillery had broken from the Napoleonic tradition of massing the guns behind the infantry in order to cripple various enemy positions of infantry and gun emplacements. Instead, the artillery spread its weapons hoping to hinder the enemy from deducing the proper range for its own gun emplacements. This meant that the enemy could not find the correct range of the French artillery, but it also meant that French fire power could not be direct and concentrated when it was most needed.

In the final analysis, the French military frequently broke with the best traditions of Napoleon I, while they


refused to discard many of his outdated ideas when it was vital that such concepts should have been discarded. At about the time the French dispersed their fire power, von Molke began to emphasize concentrated fire after watching the French in the Italian campaign in 1859. On the other hand, when the French should have broken with the Napoleonic tactic of moving into the attack by columns, so as to take full advantage of the new "chassepot" rifle, they failed to do so.
The French after 1814, in almost complete reversal to the Prussian acceptance of universal conscription, returned to the belief in a small professional army. Much of this was the result of the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy to the throne of France by the enemies of Napoleon I. Not only did the monarchy have a distaste for Napoleonic military tradition, but it also had no use for a large standing army which might arouse the hostility of the various nations which were providing the French monarchy with the support necessary for it to remain in power. In any case it was felt that a professional army could be relied upon for future support much more dependably than could a large army with a peasant base. This belief, which evolved from the conditions of 1814, was to continue as the dominant French military thought until 1870. The period from 1814, when the Bourbons abolished universal conscription, until the revolution of 1848, saw little desire for a large standing army. Only after 1848 was there any extensive feeling which realized the necessity for a conscripted army based upon the common man. This view was suppressed by Napoleon III who, during the early part of his reign, relied completely on a well-trained professional army. In the end, the "levee en masse" that was born during the French Revolution of 1792 was quickly repudiated in the country of its birth in 1814.
This is not to say that Napoleon I knowingly supported universal conscription. In 1802, Napoleon continued the policy of the Directory in allowing exceptions as long as the individual could find someone to take his place. In fact, he initiated another system of evasion by which all individuals would draw lots, and the one who drew an unlucky lot number would have to serve on active duty. Even this system was found to be unnecessary and was eliminated when Napoleon ended the "levee en masse" in 1805. Napoleon was aware of the many advantages of a professional army but he also fully realized the great need for superior numbers in many victories. It was because of this second factor that he found it necessary to gradually rely upon a large national army, rather than upon a small professional elite army. Yet, Napoleon I had set out in 1805 to develop an elite army which would follow him blindly. He replaced the citizen soldiers, with their patriotic nationalism, with the professional troopers who were well paid and well disciplined. In this instance, it could be argued that Napoleon I established the foundation for France's national dependence on a professional army. In the end, he could be considered the father of both seemingly contradictory movements. On one hand, he believed firmly in mass armies, because of his great faith in the advantage of superior numbers, while, on the other hand, he had a strong intellectual belief in

an elite professional army. In any case, Napoleon saw the necessity for the re-establishment of universal conscription after his devastating defeat in Russia in 1812. As a result, he extended this theory of a nation in arms from 1812 to 1815. During this entire three year period there developed a great hatred on the part of the French population for military conscription. When the Bourbons abolished conscription in 1814, its demise was popularly acclaimed.

After 1830, the increased fear of foreign invasion forced the development of a system that doubled the 40,000 annual recruits which France was allowed by the law of 1818. The law of 1832 divided the army into two groups: professional soldiers who served seven years, and another group which did not serve any active duty at all but were to be used as reserves for the regular army in case of a national emergency. The law also provided a ruling that forced anyone who had purchased his freedom with a replacement to do so again if his replacement deserted. The morale of the French army reached an all time low during the years following the defeat of Napoleon I.

After 1814, the majority of the French leaders failed to inspire the French military to any feats out of the ordinary. The most positive period of the French military

40. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
between 1815-1851 occurred during the reign of Louis Philippe. During this interval the French armies were disciplined and had several effective leaders. Later, when some of the French leaders tried to revive the early Napoleonic traditions, they found that the troops had lost one of the basic ingredients of a good army, namely discipline. As an indirect result, the military became a tool of the dominant French party in power. The early period of the Second Empire was centered on the glittering aspects of war, while most of the necessary reforms were swept under the carpet. The military of the Second Empire in no way changed its system to correct the anachronisms, and the army which seemingly originated as a national body, was, in the final analysis, based on a small professional army.

Before the French Revolution, the French military leaders had used the institution of the general staff, but it was abolished in 1790. Under Napoleon I a general staff was organized, but because of his own personality and military brilliance, Napoleon did not use his staff extensively in any area other than matters of supply.

After the Napoleonic era, the need for an effective general staff became increasingly evident in order to make

42. Irvine, Capital Staffs. p. 168.
more effective use of the greater artillery power in the fluid battle conditions which later developed. Although Bonaparte had shown the need to make thorough preparations for campaigns, it was the general staff of later years which inherited this job, as well as that of creating an organization to handle the increasingly massive armies.

Prussian military leaders rapidly realized the advantages of the general staff, and made maximum use of the organization. One of the greatest failures of the French military heads in 1870, on the other hand, was their inability to realize the full potential of a strong general staff.

Napoleon III was probably the only individual in France who could have brought about the needed reforms. Who was this man, Napoleon I, in whose footsteps Napoleon III had to follow? Napoleon I had as complete faith in his own military ability, as Napoleon III had in his own ability to defeat Bismarck diplomatically. Napoleon and his namesake were similar in the respect that neither could accept the appearance of another popular figure upon the French scene. The first Emperor would not let any military victories be denied him, even if they belonged to a subordinate commander. In contrast, Napoleon III, as he grew older, let the reigns of power slip from his grasp. During his later years, Napoleon III was seldom as vital a person as his uncle had been and

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43. Preston, Arms. p. 248.
probably would never have been moved to some of the rash actions of Napoleon I. The first Napoleon was a classic militarist who used any position which would give him the military advantage, as opposed to Napoleon III's lack of general concepts and continual hesitancy to use force when the possibility of defeat occurred. Napoleon I discarded all rules when considering war and must be considered a pragmatist to the core. Even though the Napoleonic blitzkrieg tactics are well known, it is wrong to assume that the inventor was foolish about these sudden thrusts. This can be seen in the comments of an English officer who had fought Napoleon I in Spain. "How absurdly Napoleon has been called a rash warrior, and one never thinking of retreat. No man ever made bolder marches, but no man ever secured his base with more care. Here, he would not suffer any advance to fresh conquests until his line of communication had been strengthened." In reality, his unorthodox method of brutal swiftness was combined with extreme care for technical details and deep consideration of tactics.

Napoleon I, in all probability, would never have allowed France's last chance of potential victory, an immediate drive into the southern Germanic states, slip away because of previous lack of planning and miscalculation, as Napoleon III did in 1870.


CHANGES DURING THE SECOND EMPIRE

It is incorrect to assume that Napoleon III's seizure of power in 1850 was viewed with disapproval by any sizable element in French society. On many occasions during the first years of the Second Empire the people overwhelmingly voted for Napoleon III in either legislative elections or in plebiscites. The last plebiscite of the early 1850's found 7,800,000 voters approving of Napoleon's coup d'etat while only 600,000 disapproved. However, this approval slowly slid to the opposite extreme, particularly between 1863 and 1870. Although Napoleon's policies became more liberal, his opposition increased in strength as he loosened control. The more the government eased the laws of the press and public meetings, the more the common man rebelled under the restrictions which remained. Finally, in 1870, a special commission reported that the workers believed their conditions could only be improved by the fall of the Second Empire. Louis Napoleon thus faced this dilemma during the latter years of his reign. It is to his credit that he continued his liberalization policy in face of this growing opposition.

When Napoleon III came to power he not only inherited the popular acclaim that had been his uncle's, but he also inherited the diplomatic problems which the first Napoleon had, to a large extent, created. In 1815 the allies tried

to guarantee the Germanic lands from ever again being invaded by the French. The victors not only restored the old 18th century Franco-German border, but they also extended Prussian influence in these frontier areas while establishing a loose Germanic Confederation, with the hope that Germanic resistance would be strong enough to resist any future French invasion. This was a harsh blow to French pride and influence. Thus, the peace of 1815 that grew out of the Napoleonic struggle was to set the French pattern of foreign policy for years to come. The view, held primarily by the British, that order in the western Germanic states would promote the peace of Europe, in actuality continually chafed the French, and was viewed by them as a continuing symbol of defeat. The friction concerning this border area continued to exist even during Napoleon III's administration, and with even greater severity after 1870. Therefore, when Napoleon III inherited the Napoleonic Legend he was also forced to accept the responsibility of resuming the Napoleonic policies with regard to the Rhineland, and regaining, by force if necessary, the open door policy to western Germany. Napoleon III sought to answer this problem by means of his policies throughout the 1860's. Because France could never accept the

peace of 1815 as a defensive measure, it watched vigilantly for the opportunity to regain its old position in the Rhineland. In 1866, Napoleon III believed that Austria would certainly defeat Prussia, or at least Prussia would have to withdraw many of its troops from the Rhine area. With the shock of Sadowa he was forced to bide his time. He weakly tried to get Bismarck to agree to some concession in the southwestern Germanic states in return for France's neutrality in 1866. Bismarck, of course, did not yield any concessions to France and, in fact, allowed some of the southern Germanic states to see Napoleon's letter, thus driving them into closer relations with Prussia. In this particular instance it can be seen that Napoleon III lacked any of the military genius of his uncle and, in the end, blundered in the area he considered his personal forte, diplomacy.

Bismarck did not underestimate Napoleon III's diplomatic skills as some historians have done in the past. He considered Louis Napoleon a worthy opponent who upon occasion was given to weakness. The Chancellor admitted only once to being completely fooled by Napoleon, and that incident occurred in 1866 after the battle of Sadowa, when Napoleon indicated that if the Prussians entered the city of Vienna it would automatically mean a declaration of war by France. Bismarck stated, "I have never forgiven him for that, but, at any rate, he has been cruelly punished in his turn."

The hatred that this incident stirred up in Bismarck seems

to shed more light on why, in 1870, he did not hesitate to distort the Ems dispatch to his own advantage.

Many historians have, until recently, taken a hostile position with regard to Napoleon III because they have judged him primarily on the last major action of his reign, the Franco-Prussian War. This tendency on the part of many authors gives a distorted view of Napoleon III. His sometimes adventurous, and eventually disastrous, foreign policy should be viewed in relationship to the various pressures brought to bear by the French public, and by the many political factions and court intrigues which continuously demanded military and diplomatic victories abroad, while none of these elements within the French society desired to make any sacrifices themselves.

It would seem that the foreign policy of Louis Napoleon during the later stages of his reign was often carried out in spite of public pressure. Finally, at the last of his crises, Louis conceded to public opinion, and disaster resulted. If these pressures were as great as some individuals believe, then it becomes evident that a great portion of Napoleon III's foreign policy was molded by his domestic needs.

Frequently, and not always with Napoleon's strong support, various groups within the Second Empire demanded war as a

means of furthering France’s foreign policy aims. Three minor wars, along with several isolated skirmishes in various parts of the world, were to form the foundation of the French military attitude of self-confidence which was so prevalent in 1870. Thus, the Second Empire’s military tradition was founded on a very weak basis as compared to that of the First Empire in 1810, which had frequently beaten its enemies in total struggles for survival, as compared to the inconsequential wars fought by the Second Empire up to 1870.

The first of these minor wars was the Crimean War which broke out in 1854. Even though the large expedition of French troops was not overly successful militarily, Napoleon III succeeded diplomatically by his achievement of an alliance with Great Britain. At the start, the French tried to use diplomacy rather than military force in handling the Crimean situation. Because this diplomacy failed and Britain demanded military action, Napoleon III could not readily refuse the use of military force and as a result he was forced to use an implement which he felt unnecessary.

During the first stages of the war, in 1854, the allied armies of 50,000 met little opposition from the 35,000 Russian troops. As the war bogged down, however, the allied victories became fewer. Because neither diplomatic nor military victory occurred quickly enough, on February 16th, Napoleon III announced that he would be forced to take supreme command of the allied forces in person.
As might be expected from past French military history, the military operations of the Crimean war showed the true valor of the individual French soldier, but it also indicated a completely inadequate military organization. Not only was general strategy lacking, but many military leaders formed views from these few isolated battles that would prevail in 1870 and lead them to make severe errors in judgement. Many of these military leaders were to make future decisions, based on these and similar cases, in the years to come. For example, the 30,000 French soldiers in the battle of Alma surprisingly found the cliffs they were to attack undefended. After some difficulty they successfully climbed the cliffs and arrived just in time to save the day for the English, who were under heavy fire, by viciously attacking the Russian flank. The haphazard manner in which this victory was achieved for the allies indicated a complete absence of general leadership and strategy that would rarely have been found under Napoleon I, during the early stage of his career.  

Again in the battle of Inkermann the French regiments arrived not a moment too soon to prevent the Russians from completely crushing the English. In fact, many English historians call this battle "the soldiers battle" since the lowly enlisted man made up for the lack of military strategy on the part of the officers. Even the most decisive battle

of all, Sebastopol, was started by a bursting bomb which was mistaken for a signal flare and an entire assault of three French divisions was launched before the necessary preparations had been made. This, of course, resulted in horrible slaughter and great mass confusion. The fact remained that the bravery of the French soldier time and again made up for the knowledge his leaders lacked. At one point, the allied troops were told to attack Russian gun positions on the causeway heights. Because of the great distance and the exposed characteristics of the assaulting force few, if any, of the attacking force reached the Russian artillery positions. When they were met with reserve Russian cavalry wholesale retreat resulted. The entire retreating body might have been destroyed if it had not been for a brilliant and valorous charge by the French 4th Chasseurs d' Afrique against the Russian positions. This charge unnerved the Russian artillery long enough so that a retreat could take place. There was never a question of the French soldier's courage during the Crimean fighting.

It must be reasoned that the Crimean war was, to a great extent, the origin of much of Napoleon III's later success in the field of foreign policy. Napoleon III had achieved the goals that he sought when he had entered this war: 52 strengthening his hold on the throne and the Napoleonic legend. He

51. Ibid., pp. 73-91.
52. Ibid., p. 94.
had successfully made an alliance with England and had forced
the entire world to recognize the supremacy of France on the
European continent.

Next came the Italian war in 1859 which hurt Napoleon's
prestige at home, as well as abroad. The Catholic clergy
in France, who had previously supported Napoleon, turned
against him when it was realized that France's support of
Italian unity would threaten the Vatican states. Napoleon
III was thus incapable of getting the continuous Catholic
support that his uncle had received from the Concordat of
1801. With its ally Sardinia, France was victorious in key
battles against the Austrians at Solferino and Magenta.

When Napoleon III saw the opposition to Italian unity that
existed in France he quickly withdrew and signed a separate
peace at Villafranca. One of the other facts that speeded
French withdrawal from the war was the fact that Prussia had
decided to send troops into the Rhineland. Napoleon III had
only 77,000 reserves in 1859 to counteract the Prussian move,
and at least 100,000 troops were necessary to balance the
situation. To his great embarrassment he found that he could
not even raise the additional 20,000 reserves and therefore
was forced to sign a peace with Austria quickly. In the end,
the war that had enhanced French prestige after its great
victory at Solferino ended in great embarrassment for France
throughout Europe. As a direct result of this incident
Napoleon III ordered the second section of the inactive reserves to be given five months active training. This training never took place for various reasons: lack of facilities, trained instructors and lack of the necessary military equipment.

The bravery of the French soldier was still in evidence during the Italian campaign. This had been shown best in hand to hand fighting with the bayonet which so amazed the Austrians that the use of the bayonet became an important technique taught by the Austrian army after 1859. The critical eye of von Moltke did not make the Austrian mistake for he fully realized the power lay not merely in the use of the bayonet, but in the French soldiers' courage. For this reason, the Prussian military training started to emphasize the accuracy of rifle fire power at a distance, rather than the usual practice of firing one wild shot and then quickly moving into close combat. In this way the Prussians hoped to cause a great many enemy casualties before any hand to hand fighting could occur in actual combat.

Even though the possibility of a war with Austria had been foreseen in France three years previously no great effort was made along the lines of planning for it. The same confusion that took place in 1854 occurred again in

1859. When the first French troops arrived in Italy they lacked almost every type of equipment, which then had to be borrowed from the Italians. The lack of planning was evident when Napoleon III stated, "We have sent an army of 120,000 men into Italy before having stocked up any supplies there. This is the opposite of what we should have done." This extremely poor military administration had existed in the French army even during the era of Napoleon I but his own military brilliance and his ability to regroup usually made up for this lack of organization. It became evident in both 1854 and 1859, however, that there was no French general who was brilliant enough to achieve what had been done from 1800-1814. Even though the French supplies and organization had been poor during these two wars, French victory occurred because their opponents' supplies and organizations were even worse than their own. This, however, was not the case in 1870.

France's third minor war during the Second Empire took place in Mexico between 1862 and 1867. One of the most important aspects of this conflict was that it greatly reduced the number of French troops in Europe. Consequently, France could not aid Austria in its war against Prussia in

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1866 with anything other than moral support. Napoleon III failed even with war to extend French influence in the Western Hemisphere. In this respect he failed as his uncle had failed before him, but he realized the weakness of committing a major portion of his best troops much less quickly than had his uncle. In addition to realizing his mistake earlier, Napoleon I had never committed crack troops to any great extent in a Western Hemispheric adventure.

During the early 1860's, Juarez, the rebel leader, led continual guerrilla warfare against the French government which was headed by Napoleon III's puppet, Maximilian. There are two important reasons for looking at the Mexican fighting from a military standpoint. The first is that the type of fighting which took place, guerrilla warfare, was to combine with the French military experiences gained from the isolated battles of the Crimean and Italian campaigns to form the military tactics they later used in 1870. In all instances methods and tactics mattered far less than the valor and capacity of the French soldiers. Had not the French army successfully protected its military reputation in all cases?

In the wars against Russia and Austria the French organization was extremely poor while fighting and defeating comparatively modern enemy armies. France's difficulties in the Mexican
episode should surely have stirred some afterthoughts in the minds of the military leaders of France. These questions bring us to our second reason for looking at the Mexican war. Again the French were victorious, but the fact remained that some of their best troops had an extremely difficult time in defeating, not the fairly modern Russian or Austrian armies, but a motley group of Mexican peasants who were untrained, ill-armed, and completely lacking in equipment. Fighting against these soldier-farmers were some of the best troops that France had at her disposal. The following is an account of what sometimes happened when these two forces faced each other. "The 'beau fait d'armes' of the 99th infantry regiment of the line consisted of a disastrous assault against Guadaloupe Hill (May 5, 1862) during the first attack on Puebla. This engagement took a heavy toll of lives and the outcome forced the French to retreat to Orizaba where they awaited reenforcements." When the United States ended its Civil War and demanded that France remove her troops from Mexico, Napoleon III not only suffered humiliation at the hands of the United States, but because of the speed of the Prussian victory he had been unable to deter the growth of Prussian power on the continent with its growing military power.

Although there had been many French military victories, a few people in France did start to realize the shallowness of these victories. There grew a restlessness within the French public who criticized Napoleon III's policies and weakened his basis for popular support. If one accepts the view that Louis Napoleon started to lose the popular support of many Catholics in 1859, and various other groups later, it becomes apparent that he instigated his policy of greater liberalization in the 1860's in the hope of winning back some of this popular support. It is questionable if the plebiscite of May 8, 1870 indicated the popular support of Napoleon III, or whether it instead endorsed his policy of liberalization.

Previous to the outbreak of the war in 1870, Paris seemed prosperous and content to many outward appearances. This facade of splendor misled many people, so that they could not see the restlessness and popular discontent that lay beneath the surface. This discontent, combined with the physical disabilities of the emperor, weakened France a great deal.

Napoleon III viewed this popular discontent with regret. He felt that the French people were not only unfit for the more liberal reforms he wanted to give them but that they

56. Schevill, Europe, p. 548.

In comparison, it is difficult for anyone to picture Napoleon I being pressured into initiating any liberal policies if they did not serve his own ends.
also held him responsible for things that he considered ridiculously petty and which were no concern of his. In general, he thought that the French people looked too much to the government to solve many of their problems.

A great deal can be said in defense of Napoleon III's reign on the basis of his liberalizing reforms that he brought about on the domestic scene in hopes of raising the average Frenchmen's standard of living. He fervently believed that the common man had the right to his "just share of the national wealth."


Elihu B. Washburne, the American Minister to France, who had been a lawyer in Illinois, and a Republican Congressman from 1853 to 1869. During his Congressional period he had been the chairman of the Committee of Commerce besides heading the Impeachment Committee of 1868. Although President Grant appointed him Secretary of State, because of certain physical disabilities he resigned the post only a few days after being appointed. Shortly after he was appointed to the post of American ambassador to France, which position he held from 1869 to 1877. During this period he viewed the Paris siege of 1870-1871 and the following days of the Paris Commune. Franklin Jameson, *Dictionary of United States History*. Boston: Puritan, 1897, pp. 693-694.

Napoleon III at first saw no need for large numbers of people to serve in the army, particularly since such a view would not have been well received by the populace of France. Consequently, when he came to power in 1852, rather than reforming the lottery system, he further corrupted the establishment by allowing each conscript to make a direct payment of between 2,000 and 2,500 francs to the government instead of hiring a substitute. This not only lessened the number of conscripts but also caused a deep feeling of hostility among the lower classes. Thus, Napoleon III, as had his uncle before him, acted against universal conscription. Only in the fleeting years of his reign did he see the error of his earlier policy.

As a result of his policy the number of annual conscripts decreased to about 20,000. This group was made up of the poorer classes who could not raise the required money to save their sons from the disaster of having to spend seven years in the army. Not only did Napoleon III's policy cause certain social stigma, but it added to his complete dependency upon a mercenary force of about 260,000 volunteers, who either reenlisted or were long service professional soldiers. His complete reliance upon this elite professional army dwindled his reserve to an insignificant number since only 20,000 men were being released from active duty each

year. His heavy spending for his exclusive Praetorian guard did not even allow enough financial support for the training of the second part of the army as allowed for in the law of 1832. This law stipulated that each year there would be a certain number of men who would be drafted into the reserve and never have to serve any time on active duty except for a few weeks of training each year. Because of the lack of finances this group of reservists never received any training whatsoever. This carelessness proved to be a decisive factor in 1859.

The fact is that the military leaders of France during the 1860's lacked any real faith in the drafted soldier. This, combined with the unwillingness of most Frenchmen to serve seven years in the army, formed a strong force that many individuals stronger than Napoleon III would have failed to change. Even Napoleon I, after his return from Moscow in 1812, had riots, mutinies and whole-scale desertion on his hands when he re-established conscription. The army leaders of the 1860's considered only the "old soldier" as having the qualities they thought necessary for a good army. The long service soldier had what was referred to as the true military spirit, "l' esprit militaire". This belief that

61. Challener, Nation in Arms. p. 15.
the individual abilities of a soldier were much more important than the total number of men was most strongly supported by Colonel Ardant du Picq. As the foremost spokesman of this view during the 1860's, du Picq spoke a great deal from experience that he had acquired in the Crimean War and the actions in Africa and Syria. What he failed to realize was that these campaigns had been limited conflicts, frequently against untrained natives or ill-equipped troops. In all of these engagements there was nothing that could have been considered a complete and full-scale war between two evenly equipped and trained modern armies. Therefore, the experiences of du Picq and many of the other leading French military minds did not prepare them for the type of warfare that they would be confronted with in 1870.

Du Picq even questioned Napoleon I's view that the number of troops under a commander's control was a decisive factor in the outcome of a battle. To point this out he wrote:

"Let us take Wagram, where his (Napoleon I) mass was not repulsed. Out of 22,000 men, from 3,000 to 1,500 reached the position. Certainly the position was not carried by them, but by the material and moral effect of a battery of one hundred pieces, cavalry, etc., etc. Were the 19,000 missing men disabled? No. Seven out of twenty-two, a third, an enormous proportion, may have been hit. What became of the 12,000 unaccounted for? They had lain down on the road, had played dummy in order not to go on to the end." 

63. Ibid., p. 208.
Du Picq supported this theory by pointing out that defeat did not result from the initial shock of two armies meeting, or the physical destruction that occurred, but only when the moral fiber of one army began to disintegrate. Thus, he believed, the greatest loss of life in battle took place when one of the armies lost its morale and plunged into headlong retreat. He supported his view when, after studying various periods of military history, he concluded that the answer to military victory was not military heroism but the suppression of fear. His theory was that since all men are afraid during combat, it was only the well disciplined troops who suppressed this fear in the decisive moments when battles were won or lost. Du Picq's acceptance of technological and tactical changes as being secondary to the morale of troops showed a vast difference from the Prussian emphasis on these military areas. He considered them of only secondary importance since both of these elements underwent continual change. For this reason du Picq thought the only stable basis of a good army must have been the morale and discipline of the individual soldier. In essence, du Picq seemed to agree with Napoleon I that certain technological and tactical changes had to occur, yet he always believed that good military discipline might carry the day in any case since it was not susceptible to change as tactics were. Although du Picq

64. Ibid., pp. 210-212.
agreed on the surface with Napoleon on this point of change, in reality he saw little need for it and thus supported the same military tactics and system that the French had used so blunderingly, yet luckily, in Italy, Africa, and Mexico.

Because of these beliefs, du Picq and the majority of the leading military minds of France felt the need for a well disciplined and well trained soldier who not only developed his professional ability but also established a personal unity which was combined with the feeling of elite pride and love of glory. This view of esprit de corps continues to dominate many military minds, even down to the present day.

The advantages of a professional army, compared to the large conscripted armies with all their mob tendencies, seemed obvious in 1860.

As a result, du Picq led the break with Napoleon I's emphasis on numerical supremacy since he believed that warfare in the 1860's had changed a great deal since the early 1800's. Du Picq stated, "In these days of perfected long-range arms of destruction a small force.... by a happy combination of good sense or genius with morale or appliances may.... secure heroic victories over a great force similarly armed." This view combined with the fact that these leaders lacked any faith in the ability of the reserves to fight also hindered the development of an adequate reserve program that might have supported the professional army when necessary.

65. Ibid., p. 215.
The obvious break between the French military strategist of 1870 and the principles of Napoleon I can best be summarized by a few quotations from Colonel du Picq who stated:

"Just as formerly it was impossible to execute fire at command, so it is today. Formerly no sight-setting was possible; it is no better today....

Man in the mass, in a disciplined body organized for combat; is invincible before an undisciplined body. But against a similarly disciplined body he reverts to the primitive man who flees before a force proved stronger, or that he feels stronger. The heart of the soldier is always the human heart. Discipline holds enemies face to face a little longer, but the instinct of self-preservation maintains its empire and with it the sense of fear. Fear....

Man in battle,... is a being to whom the instinct of self-preservation at times dominates everything else. Discipline, whose purpose is to dominate this instinct by a feeling of greater terror, can not wholly achieve it. Discipline goes so far and no farther."

One must realize that du Picq held many sound military views, but with the help of historical hindsight his failures when compared to the principles of von Moltke and von Roon become evident. Thus, it is important that we view French military thought in the 1860's within its own historical period.

This problem of conscription and a reserve program remained a major problem of the French government from the late 1850's right through to 1870. As we have seen the lack of reserves in 1859 forced the French to withdraw from the Italian campaign. Napoleon III subsequently tried to reform the inactive reserve, but this attempt at reform in 1861 must be considered a failure since the lack of reserves in 1866 again caused the French government great embarrassment. It was during this period between 1866 and 1870 that France lost her last opportunity to develop an adequate mass army that might have successfully opposed the Prussian masses.

Napoleon III and Ollivier, his prime minister, both realized the importance of numbers in a possible future war. At the Saint Cloud conferences in 1866, Napoleon spoke of a universal military system which might provide France with its needed reserve. Although he realized the importance of numerical superiority in a future war he found it necessary to ask, "How are we going to get them?" Napoleon III's reluctance to impose universal conscription must be noted as another of the indications that his administration had been far weaker than his uncle's. Napoleon I had not been at all hesitant to enforce even extreme conscription after his disastrous defeat in Russia in 1812.

At times in 1866 Napoleon III sounded as he had several years earlier when he had attempted to build himself into the image of the military genius similar to the status of his uncle by praising the Prussian conscription system. With the help of General Niel, the new Minister of War, Napoleon proposed a new conscription program. All able-bodied Frenchmen, about 160,000 men, were to be drafted and divided into two classes each year. The long seven year duty would continue but those fortunate to be in the first class could choose to end their active duty at the end of three years. By this program Napoleon III showed that he supported universal conscription, but in practical application he continued its inequalities. In the end, he showed that he knew the weakness of the French military system, yet pressures by the military leaders and French society led to his failure to bring about the needed reform. Niel was even more moderate than Napoleon since he knew the strong views of the various leading military minds who opposed the reform bill. Their program did allow for the paying of a substitute, but in any case when the individual hired a replacement to take his place on active duty he himself still had to serve a period of time in the reserve. Niel believed that this program would continue the existing long term service but support it with a much larger reserve base. However, Napoleon

and Niel soon found their program a little extreme for both the military and the general public to accept.

In general, the French military leaders strongly disliked Niel's program. Du Picq, as would be expected, wrote a book that was, in essence, a rebuttal of Niel's emphasis on military reserves. In the book, du Picq weighed the advantages and disadvantages of both a mass army of conscripts and a small elite army of professional soldiers. Of course, his conclusion was in favor of the small professional army; a choice which later history proved quite inaccurate.

Various groups united with the military leaders to bring severe pressure to bear on the deputies in the French legislature. Since Napoleon III did not have absolute control over the chamber he was never able to get them to accept his program completely. The typical view of the deputies can be summed up in the comment that one of their members made at the time. "Of course we shall be obligated to pass this bill, but we shall fix it up in such a way that it will never work." Even though most Frenchmen in 1866 gloried in the


This opposition would never have occurred in the First Empire since Napoleon I would never have allowed any question of his military decisions. Du Picq's view was much more to the liking of various elements within French society because it offered the least amount of change. It, of course, offered most groups the easy way out and as a result won quick popular approval.

victories of Napoleon I, few if any had a desire for the renewal of his campaigns. The Prussian victory at Sadowa developed two contradictory feelings: that of hatred for Prussia, and the desire for war; the second was that of hatred of soldiering and the fight to remain free from it. The draft program not only met resistance from the wealthy who could no longer escape by payment, but surprisingly, from the peasants who had enjoyed at least a gambling chance previously of evading the draft altogether. The government did its best to lessen the opposition to the reform and the bill finally passed the chamber as expected. The impurities of the law had decreased its opposition by various groups, but the real test, that of application, enabled Napoleon III's opponents the chance to agitate violent riots against his administration. In the final analysis, the only good change which occurred as a result of the law was the ending of the policy of exoneration which had been instituted under Napoleon I. The bill itself did not bring about any change in practice, and the result was that two years later the French army that opposed the Prussians was in all aspects the same one that Napoleon III had considered quite inadequate earlier.

The only real result of the reform bill was that it caused a great deal of restlessness with the reign of Napoleon

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73. Challener, Nation in Arms, p. 27.
III. Its military value was nonexistent and it only served to weaken the Emperor's already declining hold on power in France.

Another factor which weakened the reform movement was the death of Marshal Niel. The inadequate number of military instructors to teach the National Guard units that existed on paper, and the unwillingness of the French people to bear the burden of part time military service made the French National Guard a meaningless reserve for the small professional army.

Not only were the French lacking in any concept of how huge the numbers of combatants in a war with Prussia might be, but they also lacked any detailed plan for war with Prussia. Any French ideas on this subject were usually confined to thoughts of quick and sudden victories for France. The French plan, as far as one existed, counted heavily on the tradition of friction between the southern German states and Prussia, and the swiftness of French action to counterbalance the numerical superiority of the Prussian troops. This French plan was based on a loose agreement with Italy and Austria whereby the French armies of about 150,000 men were to cross the Rhine River at Germersheim and march into Bavaria. This action was planned not only to separate the northern and southern Germanic states but to provide the

74. Wright, *Conscription in France*. p. 45.
necessary time needed for the Italian and Austrian armies to join the French forces already in Bavaria. Once the three armies were united under the command of a general previously decided upon by the three countries, their total force would number 300,000 men. About 35,000 Italians were to be sent to occupy Munich while the rest of the armies were to start toward Frankfurt so as to establish a base for the future campaign to occupy the rest of Germany. The plan also provided that the strong French navy with war ships and transportation carriers were to land a strong French force in Northern Prussia which was to act in a holding manner against the Prussian forces. The key factor in the French plan was the quickness in which the major part of the French army assembled around Alsace. However, as it later proved,


The French army in 1870 probably had a much better organization than it had had in 1796 but the military leaders at this later date were found lacking in the ways of military theory. This can be seen in the French military's plan to occupy Prussia in 1870.

77. Oncken, Napoleon III. p. 205-206. Also see appendix II.
the rail transportation was found very inadequate and only about 100,000 troops were able to be transported to Strasbourg, the center of the French preparations, while about 150,000 men had to leave the trains at Metz until further provisions could be made for them.

When Napoleon III arrived at Metz, a week after the start of the war, he found whole regiments incomplete, and entire divisions had not been heard from. Napoleon, realizing the importance of an early French attack, ordered his armies to attack, but his generals pointed out that this would be impossible because of the various conditions. Thus, France allowed its one chance for a quick military victory to slip from its grasp. In the end, French leaders realized that they would not be fighting an offensive war, but rather a defensive one.

The French military leaders in 1870 apparently failed to recognize that the fundamental base of the Napoleonic military tradition rested on the victorious offensive. If they did recognize this principle they disregarded it, and in addition disregarded the temperament of the individual French soldier who was at his best in offense and hand to hand fighting. Instead, the French leaders viewed the recent developments of the "mitrailleuse" and the "chassepot" with

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their long range and rapid fire power as a growth toward a defensive type of fighting emphasized by favorable positions. Thus, the French military leaders failed to accept the Napoleonic tradition of offense and became entranced with the military school of defensive positions.

The lack of an agency, a general staff, with a central power to coordinate the various military movements can often be decisive, as was possibly the case in France in 1870. The command of the French armies fell to different individuals at various times and often during disadvantageous periods. All the French military commanders had to consider the importance of Paris in any defensive plans and in this respect they were forced to limit their thinking. These political pressures upon the military tactics can best be illustrated later when we view the fall of Sedan.

Although the French lacked all adequate preparations for war France's diplomatic actions previous to 1870 gave no indication of these inadequacies. When France vetoed the unification of the northern and southern Germanic states, preventing the formation of a German confederation, old fears were aroused in Germany. The old memories of their struggle against Napoleon I and the futile attempts of Napoleon III to gain concessions stirred a desire to 'liberate' the Germanic peoples of Alsace-Lorraine. The first incident that would


set the stage for what finally burst in 1870, was laid in 1866.

By early 1870, Bismarck believed that Napoleon III wanted the Germans to be in a position of accepting either war or humiliation. His views of the fanatical remarks by some of the French representatives in their chamber and by the French press seemed to strengthen his opinion that war was inevitable. This belief on the part of Bismarck only left little room for rational action.

When the Hohenzollern incident occurred the Paris newspapers were filled with articles on how the French government should have used force in preventing this German "outrage", even if it was necessary for France to go to war. The moderation of a few French officials, led by Napoleon III, seemed to act as a calming force during this early stage of hysteria.

After a time it seemed that this incident had been settled peacefully, but later, when the French Ambassador Benedetti and the Prussian King William met, their meeting became greatly exaggerated out of true proportions by various French elements, apparently to stir and agitate the French populace. On the Prussian side, Bismarck, who was at a


83. Washburne, Recollections. p. 29.

84. Ibid., p. 33.
meeting with von Moltke and von Roon, received the original telegram from King William of Prussia telling of the meeting between him and the French ambassador. All three Prussians became discouraged that the last opportunity to go to war with France was evaporating. Bismarck then hit upon the scheme of editing the now famous Ems dispatch in a way that would make war almost inevitable.

To the neutral observer it would appear that certain powerful segments within French society were also in determined to have war along with their Prussian counterparts. The adventurers and plotters who surrounded the Emperor seemed to have used their influence to arouse the feelings for war. In all probability, Napoleon III never wanted the war since he had recently been quite successful in bring about a series of liberal reforms. The elements that desired war with Prussia finally carried the day, and war was declared.

After the declaration of war, the first months were used to try to build the unprepared French armies into successful fighting units. The French troops were as brave and as capable of patriotic sacrifice as their Prussian rivals. It is incorrect to assume that the French troops lacked any of the basic skills and valor of any other soldiers of this

85. Ollivier, The Franco-Prussian War. p. 482. Also see appendix III.
86. Washburne, Recollections. p. 34.
period. The fact was, however, that the campaign of 1870 was a classic example of the uselessness of valor and patriotic effort when there was a great lack of technological and military preparations, and a weakness of leadership. This is even truer when the rival force has an efficient and well oiled military machine that has kept attuned to the recent scientific innovations through which maximum benefit can be gained through the central control of an efficient general staff.

Up until this time, Napoleon III had been successful at getting the French people to view him as his uncle's worthy successor. His name allowed him to gain military acclaim when in reality he had little right to it. He had based his true power on political diplomacy rather than military ability. The generals to whom he frequently gave command positions were loyal to him, or had become antiquated. Although universal military training had been reinstituted a huge section of the male population was still exempt from conscription. The majority of the reserves who were to be used to bolster the professional army were inadequate. The railroads were almost completely ill-prepared for mobilization. Many of the minor military articles, like boots and clothing, were missing. As the final inadequacy, decisive above all previous points, there was found to be an utter lack of competent commanders.
On July 23, 1870 the first Prussian division crossed the French frontier, and began to march in the general direction of St. Avold. This could be considered the first step in the systematic Prussian invasion of France. Napoleon III assumed direct command of the French troops in the area of St. Avold. On July 31, when the French and Prussian advance posts met in Saarbrück, the small skirmish that resulted was viewed as a great French victory. The error of Louis Napoleon in not demanding a continuous French drive into southern Germany, despite the fact that his leading generals had opposed it, lost the last opportunity the French had for victory. Yet it was still feasible, if Napoleon III had had the military ability of his uncle, for the French to launch an attack with a force made up of a few infantry divisions and Frossard's cavalry divisions, into some of the Rhenish provinces. Thus, they could have blockaded Saar-louis, driven back the weak Prussian forces in that area, and established strong defensive positions around Kreuznach. From these positions the French could have assaulted the German forces, while hindering the movements of the larger German army by destroying the railroads. These victories would have given the French the precious time they needed while improving French morale. This lack of French mobility and preoccupation with defensive measures was to prove fatal.

87. Although it is unlikely that Napoleon I would ever have allowed himself to be so ill-prepared; had he found himself in the situation in 1870, it would be quite doubtful that he would have missed the opportunity.

At the outbreak of the war the strongest element in favor of the French was the bravery of the individual French soldier. During the era of the first Napoleon the French fighting man had proven himself capable and honorable. He continued this tradition throughout the following years in the battles of Sebastopol and Solferino and immediately preceding 1870. The Germans who opposed the professional French troops, until they nearly disappeared during the latter half of 1870, had great respect for the French infantry and realized how well they deserved the reputation that tradition had given them.

This well-founded confidence in the supremacy of the French army was prevalent not only in France but in many other areas, such as Luxembourg. When some Prussian troops has shot the mayor of Wissembourg, the comment was made that the French troops would very soon teach the Prussians a lesson.

The optimistic Frenchman, even after the war, felt that his nation still had had the chance of military victory. This view pointed to the weakness of the military leadership as the cause for the defeat in 1870. It was supposed that if the French army had crossed the Saar with the numerical superiority, which in theory it had until August 15th, it could have defeated the Prussian troops in Palatinate before

89. Hohenlohe, Infantry. p. 4.

von Moltke was able to implement his plan. This opinion also reasoned that even after September 16th, had the French leaders been intelligent enough to withdraw toward Paris instead of Sedan, the results of the war could have been quite different.

This great self-confidence on the part of Frenchmen in general was one thing, but the same view on the part of the French military leaders often led, at the start of the war, to very lax reconnaissance. They failed to use their cavalry for this purpose and thus neglected one of the basic Napoleon-ic principles.

The German armies in 1870 made extensive use of their cavalry for reconnoitering purposes. Frequently, their cavalry would move 15 to 20 miles in advance of the main German units. This tactic was similar to that of Napoleon I who, when in doubt as to the enemy's movements, would often send out reconnoitering cavalry with definite orders to take enemy prisoners in order to learn of his opponent's movements.

The French, on the other hand, until they were surprised by the Prussians at Beaumont, frequently allowed the German reconnaissance units to get close enough to the French camp so that they could see the French activities in detail.

93. Ibid., p. 47.
In other respects, however, the cavalry was not used extensively by either side in the Franco-Prussian War. Although the German cavalry did an outstanding job of observing the French army movements they were rarely used to their full potential as an attacking force against enemy infantry. Occasionally, small numbers of cavalry were used in coordination with other elements of the army. However, large numbers of cavalry were seldom used as they had been earlier. Napoleon I used large masses of cavalry divided into four or six regiments, which frequently attacked in two or three lines almost equal in numbers. Bonaparte usually attacked disorganized infantry at timely intervals with devastating results. The chaos which existed on the battlefields in 1870 could have similarly been used to advantage by the use of large cavalry forces. The factor of surprise, plus the excellent natural cover found in the region of the fighting in 1870, could have provided either the French or German cavalry with good opportunities for favorable attacks. In any case, neither side used the cavalry as successfully as it might have been used.

On August 6th the French military suffered two defeats. The first occurred when the Germans drove Marshal MacMahon from the heights around Worth while dealing him a loss of 6,000 men. During the same day, General Frossard's troops,

94. Ibid., pp. 372, 374-375.
who held a strong defensive position above Saarbruck, were driven in mass confusion towards Metz by another German army. After the French forces regrouped in the vicinity of Metz they fought several unsuccessful battles around Metz with only small losses. Finally, Marshal Bazaine ordered the retreat of the French forces from Metz to Verdun, but during the retreat his army suffered a defeat near Grave-lotte.

**BATTLE OF MARS-LA-TOUR**

During this phase of the fighting, Bazaine failed to abide by Napoleon I's rule of thumb which emphasized the importance of avoiding any unnecessary delay in time of battle, because in certain instances a single day's delay of plans could be disastrous. In all probability, Bazaine could have escaped from Metz if the Prussian 1st and 2nd armies had followed through with their plan to rest on August 15th. It becomes evident that in this case the Prussians were following the Napoleonic strategy, while on the other hand Bazaine made the blunder of delaying his withdrawal one complete day, thereby making the French withdrawal extremely treacherous.

By August 14th the French army, under Bazaine, was located east of Metz confronting the German 1st army, while

the German 2nd army was advancing on Moselle to the south.

Only the slowness of Bazaine's reaction to von Moltke's over-extended advance guard saved it from being isolated and destroyed. In this instance von Moltke was saved from destruction by the individual action of some of his subordinates, and seems to have unwittingly made use of the Napoleonic principle of the necessity of an advance guard furiously attacking the enemy, thereby drawing their attention and allowing for greater flexibility in the movements by the larger part of the army.

On August 16th, the Prussian vanguard attacked the French army, commanded by Bazaine, thinking that it was merely the rearguard for the French withdrawal to the north. When Prince Frederick Charles arrived on the scene and realized that his army was opposed by Bazaine's entire 140,000 men, he ordered that continuous pressure be applied by the German left flank while the right flank held its position. Although the Prussian advance guard had over-extended itself, their good system of communications facilitated the swift movement of troops into the areas desired. At times it may have appeared that the German 1st and 2nd armies were moving in a line not connecting the 3rd army, but in reality they had a common base on the Rhine River, from Coblentz to Germersheim, while

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96. Ibid., p. 124.
their flankers were never farther than one day's march from each other. Although when the complete armies confronted each other the French were usually numerically inferior, they seldom made any attempt to concentrate a more numerous force in a particular area, which would have enabled them to separate and defeat the isolated German forces. This shortcoming is best illustrated during the battle on August 16th at Mars-la-Tour. The German right flank firmly held its position with the help of heavy artillery while occasionally attempting to defeat small sections of the French line. Bazaine concentrated most of his reinforcements in this area since he feared that he might be cut off from Metz. Due to the great number of German artillery pieces on this flank, all attempts by the fresh French troops in this sector were in vain.

This situation had resulted because of Bazaine's late decision to move in the direction of Verdun, but the decision also over-extended the German forces who were trying to cut off the French route to Verdun. The German 2nd Corps at Flavigny faced not only the French Batailles division of the French 2nd Corps, but also the entire 6th Corps. The German 3rd Corps was not only completely committed but had previously suffered heavy casualties in earlier fighting. The only


100. Whitton, Decisive Battles. p. 154.
other German Corps close enough to provide any assistance, the 10th Corps, was still a great distance away. The French forces at this time were also being strengthened by the arrival of the 3rd and 4th Corps and, as a result, could easily have swept the German left flank while rolling up the German line as it moved forward. The only thing the French needed was a commander who had the vision to see and understand the complex situation, and then give the necessary orders which could only have climaxed in victory. In any case, Bazaine, because of the hugeness of the conflict, was unable to rise to the opportunity. He was thinking more along the lines of a defensive strategy and greatly feared that his base of operations, Metz, would be cut off.

During the fighting the German left flank remained fluid for the entire day. About half of the German 19th Division of the 10th Corps arrived in the vicinity of Mars-la-Tour and was immediately ordered to assist the German 3rd Corps by attacking the French right flank. This half of the 10th Division, made up of five battalions of Guard Dragoons, advanced across almost completely open ground in front of the French right flank. Within a short period this German force was shattered, with its remnants falling back to Tronville. The French attempted to follow up their success but their hesitancy to throw in greater numbers of

reinforcements made their attempt preordained to failure. A little later, General von Rheinbaben, commander of the German 5th Cavalry Division attempted to envelop the French right wing. Although the French had almost three full cavalry divisions located nearby they failed to make maximum use of all of their forces by holding many in reserve. As a result, the French were forced to withdraw to Bruville while the Prussians had won the important element of time. The remaining day was primarily of a stationary nature with both sides making occasional assaults on each other's positions.

The importance of the battle of Mars-la-Tour was that the French military leaders missed a great opportunity. The fewer German forces not only successfully stopped the French retreat but allowed enough time for the main German force to intercede between the two French armies of Bazaine and MacMahon, thus ending the French hope of combining their two armies. Bazaine had failed to dislodge the German advance guard and had decided against a more circuitous route west and thus fell back under the covering guns of Metz. After the battle of Gravelotte on August 18th the French army, commanded by

102. Envelopment is an attack made on one or both of the enemy's flanks or rear, usually accompanied by an attack on his front.


104. Ibid., p. 156.
Bazaine, had been fairly well cut off from the rest of France.

The fact remained that the German view, even after August 18th, was not so optimistic as most observers would have believed. The official German account of this period of the fighting indicated that Bazaine still had excellent opportunities to break out of Metz as late as August 31st. If this account was accurate, how much more favorable would his chances have been eleven or twelve days earlier when the German forces were extremely scattered in the south, is open now only to speculation. This German account describes the possibility on August 31st of Bazaine's breakout from Metz to the south as follows:

"Far fewer difficulties were presented by the local conditions to the south of Metz. A forward movement on this side would find in that terrain, as on the northeast, a large space for development upon both banks of the Seille, along the three great roads to Solgne, Nomeny, and Cheminot. Should the bulk of the army of the Rhine make a sudden dash along these roads, while a left detachment shaped its course for Courcelles sur Nied; and a second, under the protection of the fortress-artillery, showed front towards Ars and Jouy somewhere in the neighborhood of Frescaty, in order to detain the VII and VIII Prussian Corps in the passage of the Moselle, there was, in view of the position at that time of the investing army, and that too without any very severe struggle. It is true that the French leaders would have been forced in any case to abandon their trains, and even then would have been sooner or later threatened in flank and rear by the forward pressure of the Corps of the investing army. But Marshal Bazaine might hope in all cases to find his line of march at any rate open, to sever temporarily the but weakly guarded communications of the Germans, and, although not without considerable difficulties as to supply, to escape with a large part of his army to the southward."106


BATTLE OF SEDAN

As previously mentioned, when Marshal MacMahon took command of the retreating French troops who had been beaten at Geisburg, and ordered them to re-group and fight at Worth on August 6th, approximately 32,000 French troops met the 40,000 Prussians at Worth. Eventual German victory quickly became evident due to the Prussians' superiority of numbers. In this clash, as in many of the previous ones, the Prussians continued to be victorious, but also lost many men because they continued to charge in mass formations.

The Germans would frequently carry the day on sheer numbers alone no matter what kind of superior position or courage the French troops showed. MacMahon, with his small army slightly reinforced, fell back from Worth and retreated toward Nancy. As MacMahon slowly withdrew, it became evident that the famous French legend concerning French ability to improvise was not entirely untrue. Nearly 100,000 troops from various groups were gathered with their equipment under the command of MacMahon. In all probability, the number and valor of these men were adequate, but supplies of medicine, communications and artillery were either totally lacking or insufficient. With a great commander of the stature of Napoleon I this army, with its nucleus of trained professional infantrymen, could have taken a heavy toll of the

German forces. Even a leader of far less ability than Napoleon I should have been able to hold his position at least long enough for Bazaine to start an offensive action, and possibly long enough for a third French army to be formed in Paris. Had not Napoleon I during his last Hundred Days, and in fact after his defeat in 1812, used the same type of raw recruit to hold the larger more experienced armies of the allies to a standstill? In any case, MacMahon was not Napoleon I, and therefore it is probably unfair to make the comparison.

MacMahon's first plan to fight a delaying action while retreating from Chalons had to be changed when Comte de Palikao, Minister of War, telegraphed that a revolution would take place in Paris if MacMahon abandoned Bazaine. Not desiring to act against the orders of Palikao, MacMahon ordered his army to march toward the Meuse with the chance that Bazaine might be able to unite with him. This interference by politicians could never have occurred under Napoleon I since political repercussions seldom influenced his military strategy. Napoleon I was concerned, first and foremost, with military tactics, as Moltke showed himself to be in 1870. As a result, weak politics had left France unprepared for war; weaker politics were then to destroy possibly the last chance that France had of averting defeat.

MacMahon not only was weakened by various political pressures on him, but also apparently forgot one of Napoleon I's key tactical maneuvers: avoiding the danger of a flanking movement while within striking distance of the enemy. MacMahon's retreat, which was of a defensive nature, from Meuse on August 30th, 1870 was completely opposite Napoleon Bonaparte's retreat from Leipzig in 1813. Napoleon I had always argued that the use of a flank march when within attacking distance of the enemy was completely foolish, although sometimes more convenient than the traditional column movement. MacMahon broke this tactic when he used a flank march in front of the enemy position held by the German Crown Prince. MacMahon had hoped he could force march his troops to Sedan so that they might be united with the forces under Bazaine. Because his troops could not move as quickly as was necessary, MacMahon's force was stopped and then attacked while in the flanking movement. This blunder was to lead to the disaster of Sedan which soon followed.


Napoleon I, with about 35,000 men, could possibly have avoided the battle that resulted at Hanau by trying to pass the Rhine at either Coblenz or Mannheim. Instead he proved that certain elements, such as the defense of a chosen terrain, could prove quite advantageous to a retreating army. On Oct. 30, 1813, the Bavarian army of 50,000 tried to block his retreat at Hanau. By the brilliant use of his artillery he blew apart the enemy lines and continued his withdrawal.

110. Flank march takes place when a unit moves to the left or right.

On August 31st, the German army overtook MacMahon's troops a short distance north of the Rheims River. After a fierce battle they drove the French army toward Sedan. During the entire day there was a continuous series of bloody skirmishes as the French troops, pressed on every side, fell back exhausted into Sedan.

September 1st found the French surrounded and all avenues of escape cut off. They were crowded together in a narrow area, while five hundred Prussian artillery pieces fired at point blank range.

Above all things, the German victory at Sedan was a German artillery victory over French artillery. The French paid no attention to the Napoleonic principle of massing artillery pieces for concentrated fire power and, as a result, were completely silenced by the German guns. Not only did the French use their artillery by independent batteries, but they even failed to have any conceivable plan or pattern in which these batteries were to be used. With this victory of the German artillery, came the collapse of the French resistance.


114. Boguslawski, Tactical Deductions. p. 78.
When MacMahon was wounded at Sedan he was succeeded by Marshal Ducrot as commander of the French troops. Just as Ducrot was to attempt to break out of Sedan he was relieved of his command by General Wimpffen, who brought new orders from the War Minister in Paris. Wimpffen failed to take stock of the existing situation until it was too late. This incident merely shows how the continual political pressures from Paris hindered the military effort of the men doing the fighting.

After twelve hours of this unequal struggle, the French commanders reported to the emperor that they could no longer offer serious resistance. When surrender became inevitable, Napoleon III assumed full responsibility and ordered the French to surrender.

In all reality the fall of Sedan meant the end of the war, and any chance that France might have had to be victorious. Bismarck, on the following day, September 3, 1870, fully summarized the facts in a letter to his wife: "Yesterday and the day previous, therefore, have cost France a hundred thousand men and an Emperor. Today the latter, with all his attendants, horses, and carriages, have started for Wilhelmshöhe near Cassel. This is a great historical event - a victory for which we must humbly give God the glory, and which ends the war, even if we have to carry it further against the country deprived of its leaders."

CAUSES OF DEFEAT

The eighteenth century military theorists, led by Napoleon I, had constantly striven for great speed and decisiveness in warfare. Although Napoleon I had successfully used this type of warfare in achieving military victories, he had failed to establish a lasting peace in Europe for various other reasons. Napoleon I never desired a balance of forces within Europe; rather he had tried to set up a system of peace dependent upon himself and his military victories. This could not last since the peace was entirely dependent on Napoleon who, as a human being, could not live forever. It was also questionable if France, the nation, had the ability or desire to sustain this type of peace for any lengthy period. The failure of Napoleon I to limit the power and the influence of Great Britain must also be considered one of the leading reasons for not achieving peace in Europe. The continued independence of England allowed her to assist both Napoleon's domestic and foreign enemies. Napoleon III, on the other hand, trying to apply the Napoleonic tradition of a Europe dominated by France, met many of the same difficulties that his uncle had met before him. Although Napoleon III lacked the military decisiveness of his uncle, his army had done an adequate job in consolidating French influence up to 1870. In fact, Napoleon III out did his uncle when he realized the error
of not containing English influence. This neutralization of active British support of France's enemies became one of the mainstays of Napoleon III's foreign policy. Only in the latter stages of his reign did he fail to cultivate the friendship of Britain. This point proved decisive since it assured British neutrality during 1870-1871 even though the majority of the British populace sympathized with the French nation. Bismarck not only tried to continually avoid any friction with Britain, but he also tried after the German victory to create a peace that was, at least on the surface, based not only on military conquest, but also had a facade of having the general consent of the people. Although he failed on this point, primarily because of the Alsace question, the fact remains that the only reason that Moltke's military victories were not to remain isolated battles was due entirely to the great statesmanship of Bismarck. The peace he arranged did not last forever, but it was successful over a short period of time.

It is incorrect to conclude that the only cause of the French defeat in 1870 was wholly the responsibility of the French military. The French defeat in 1870, similar to that of the Prussians at Jena in 1806, was the product of many and various elements within both societies. The Prussians in 1806 were a classic example of a highly disciplined, elite

army which was the product of its Junker society. Napoleon I, with his new applications of warfare, such as the use of mass armies, showed the Prussians the necessity of change. In 1870, the roles were exactly reversed. Von Moltke, with his new innovations, showed the French people that their 18th century army left a great deal to be desired. Even though the French army was one of the best fighting forces of the period it was obvious that in the future it had to be patterned along the modern 19th century lines of the Prussian army. The success of the Third Republic indicates not only a political change after 1870, but also a social change. Many Frenchmen woke to the reality that Prussia had not only gained on France militarily, but also culturally, economically, and technologically; whereas the nation under Napoleon III had remained rather stationary in various areas in addition to the military.

If the French military was not the only cause of French defeat in 1870, in all probability it must bear the majority of the burden. Most of the military minds followed the lead of a few outstanding individuals like du Picq, while their personal experiences in France's various campaigns reinforced these views. As a child is limited in his development to his environment, so also were the French military leaders limited to their own experiences. The
isolated battles and campaigns against various backward peoples were not conducive to the development of many new military tactics. In all of these earlier campaigns the valorous tradition of heroism of the French soldier which went back to the Napoleonic Era, continued without break. The most important quality that the French army lacked in 1870, as was previously seen in light of earlier campaigns, was in the area of military theory. The regulations that governed the French army during 1870 were none other than those that the Prussians had discarded after the battle of Jena in 1806. Due to the fact that France's armies had a continuous chain of victories, starting from the most impressive in 1854, the French military considered itself the best in the world.

The real weakness of the French army lay in the fact that it completely lacked any advanced and sophisticated course in tactics for its officers. Since the only courses French officers did receive were of a basic introductory nature few officers rose to anything more than subordinate field officers in their knowledge of military strategy and tactics. When it came time to appoint commanders it was necessary to appoint individuals who were probably quite qualified on the lower practical levels, but who were completely unschooled in a knowledge of general tactics. In fact, Napoleon III, because

he felt it necessary to play the role of heir to his uncle's military genius, while in reality he knew little about military theory, avoided a great deal of conversation on military tactics that might possibly have shown his ignorance in that area. Because of this, it frequently became necessary for the military commanders to rely on flash inspirations in time of battle, rather than on previous tactical plans that had not been formulated in any great detail.

During 1870 French strategists seemed unmindful of the changes that had taken place since the time of Napoleon Bonaparte. These developments were readily absorbed by the Germans who realized more fully the effect of the breech loading rifle on both tactics and movement of troops. These Prussian insights and subsequent improvement in their military strategy and organization, while the French remained completely static, were important factors in the outcome of the war between the two countries.

120. Ibid., p. 268.
121. Boguslawski, Tactical Deductions, p. 175.
CONCLUSION

The fighting in 1870 started with both nations possessing professional armies and, at least nominally, ready for war. The commands on both sides made various miscalculations and mistakes, but the Germans took advantage of their enemy's errors more than did the French. Despite the fact that the German plan of attack was not at all sophisticated or subtle, and relied on sheer massing of force, it was victorious. This war must be considered one of the most bitter, decisive, and most consequential wars of Europe since the days of Napoleon I. To Germany this war still represents some of the most glorious chapters of its national history; whereas to France this period stands out as one of the most humiliating in its long national history.

In the final analysis, it would seem that it was the Napoleonic military system and tradition, developed, pruned, and efficiently used by the German military leaders, that quickly crushed the French armies in 1870.

The military genius of von Moltke was, in a sense, not as great as that of Napoleon I. Moltke's main interest and ability lay in the fact that he could develop excellent general tactics, and was able to organize an administration

123. Lord, War of 1870. p. 3.
that could carry out these tactics. In a true sense he was the first of the great modern generals. The German victories were not due to the immediate commanders, as the Napoleonic victories of 1800-1814 had been. The German military strength came from a detailed military organization, better military education of their officers, and from their frequent numerical superiority. These very characteristics were to become the most important concern of the modern armies today. The importance of numerical superiority forced the demise of the small elite professional armies of the past. Instead, the German system of a "nation in arms" revolutionized the military tradition in Europe, so that the entire male population of a nation was trained, armed, and could be concentrated at any one point within a few days. Many of these qualities of a modern army can easily be viewed as the logical outcome of Napoleonic tactics.

The responsibilities of the war itself must rest with both sides. In the case of France, the Napoleonic tradition made war almost inevitable by its continuing policy of frustrating the attempts at unification by the southern and northern Germanic states. France had intervened in German domestic affairs after the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 in an effort to prevent such unification.

Napoleon III, during the later stages of his government, allowed French leadership to fall into the hands of Ollivier

and Gramont, who were a poor match for the crafty Bismarck. If Napoleon III had been at his peak of power, as he had been during the early 1850's, the turn of events might have been different. What occurred under Napoleon III would probably not have taken place under his uncle, since the first Napoleon could never bring himself to designate any great amount of power to any of his subordinates. In ordinary times Napoleon III probably would have been the most powerful force in Europe, but as an opponent of Bismarck, he was found lacking. Napoleon III's error was not entirely due to his lack of military knowledge, but was due largely to the fact that by the late 1860's he lacked the true complete authority of a dictator. However, because many considered him so, it was necessary for him to accept the mistakes that did not entirely belong to him. In all reality, he was the product of his times: the results of the desires of the French people to continue the glorious myth of the Napoleonic Empire. On the other hand, they refused to support it financially or militarily to the extent that would have made it a success. The difference between the two Napoleons in this area was noticeable in that Napoleon III asked for the people's support, while Napoleon I demanded it.

In addition, the military leaders themselves failed to hold true to the Napoleonic tradition at its best. They
lacked the foresight to realize the important lessons of Napoleon I and, in fact, in several instances acted in complete opposition to the old master. Perhaps this failure is basically due to the well worn rule that few men ever realize the importance of various things which they have grown and developed beneath their own roof. Possibly they thought that since the Napoleonic tradition belonged to them it would remain with them forever despite changing conditions and times. The French military leaders had failed to hold true to Napoleon I's most precious principle: the constant need for change of military strategy to fit the different situations. They were only pragmatic to the point that they concluded that their victories in 1854, 1859 and 1862 were good enough examples of their military prowess to preclude the necessity for any change. These same military leaders failed to see the underlying weakness of most of these victories.

In any case, both Napoleon III and the French military strategists merely reflected the French society of their time, to a lesser or greater degree. In the final analysis, the blame must fall on French society for the failure of the Napoleonic tradition during the Second Empire. The French people paid lip service to the glories of the First Empire and the military victories of the first Napoleon. However, had Napoleon III tried to continue his uncle's exploits on a great scale he probably would have met strong opposition and possibly even been overthrown. The result was a feeling
that prevailed throughout French society, the government, and
the military which was conducive to an exterior of glamor and
glitter, although beneath the surface lay laxness and dis-
interest. I am inclined to agree with the general trend
among many recent historians that the positive aspects of the
reign of Louis Napoleon outweighed the negative points. Had
his years ended with victory instead of defeat, earlier
historians would have been much more likely to have consider-
ed his reign a success.

Prussia, in all probability, carried out the Napoleonic
tradition much farther than the very country that had borne
its founder. In the form of Bismarck, Prussia had a man who
was probably even more brilliant than Napoleon I diplomatically.
Bismarck believed as fervently as Bonaparte that any
device should be used to reach the desired ends. Although
both men probably emphasized this pragmatic approach, Bismarck,
being more skilled in the use of these diplomatic tools,
would have won the fervent approval of Napoleon I. Von Moltke,
on the other hand, was probably not as skilled a military
genius as was Bonaparte, yet he finished the required job
efficiently and successfully. Moltke, while a more conservative
militarist than Napoleon Bonaparte, would probably have been
Napoleon's equal in the modern warfare of the 19th century.

126. Spitzer, Napoleon III. pp. 308-310.
It is quite possible that Moltke might even have beaten Napoleon I on the modern battlefield, since warfare had become a science and the best commander was frequently the one most skilled with the various tools of modern warfare and having the ability to organize them so that maximum efficiency could be acquired.

The Franco-Prussian War saw the arming of huge masses of men with weapons that had been provided by the recent growth of industrialization. They were led to war by military leaders who had absorbed and improved upon the traditions and strategies of Napoleon Bonaparte. Modern war had been made possible, and the era of Napoleon I, when one individual could do all jobs well, had come to an end. The time of the specialist had begun, with the need for a commander-in-chief who observed the combat from a distance, while simultaneously planning future strategy.
Emperor Napoleon III to General Lebrun on the general plan of war.

November, 1869

"Oh, reprit l'Empereur, on pourrait pourtant établir ce plan sans y faire entrer d'alliance sûres ou probables. Mais, au surplus, il serait permis de considérer l'alliance d'Italie, comme certaine, et celle de l'Autriche comme assurée moralement, sinon activement."

127. Oncken, Napoleon III. p. 204.
Report of General Lebrun on the deliberations of the French council of war on May 19, 1870, with the Emperor Napoleon III in the chair.

...."L'Empereur exprimait ensuite son opinion personelle, se déclara favorable à un plan de campagne qui reposerait sur les données suivantes....La guerre étant declarée, trois armées, de 100,000 hommes chacune, l'une française, une autre autrichienne et la troisième italienne, envahiraient aussitot la territoire du midi de l'allemande. Les trois armées auraient pour premier objectif un point central du territoire de ces Etats. Elles s'y concentreraient sous le commandement d'un généralissime designé d'avance par les trois souverains intéressés. Sur les 300,000 hommes réunis ainsi, un corps de 30 à 40,000 Italiens serait jeté à Munich pour occuper, en permanence, cette capitale de la Bavière. Au moyen de ces premières dispositions, on pouvait espérer que l'on détacherait de la Prusse les forces de la Bavière, du Wurtomberg et du Grand-Duche de Badé.... Ce premier résultat obtenu, l'armée alliée, diminuée des 40,000 Italiens laisses à Munich, se dirigerait vers le haut Mein pour aller prendre pied en Franconie et s'y établir sur une base d'operations s'entendant de Würtzbourg à Nuremberg ou Amberg. C'est de cette base qu'elle partirait ensuite pour commencer les grandes operations de la campagne."
APPENDIX III

The Ems dispatch sent from the King of Prussia, July 13, 1870, to Bismarck. The original version, No. 27, No. 61, reads as follows:

"M. Benedetti accosted me on the promenade, in order to demand of me - most importunately, at last, that I should authorize him to telegraph to Paris that I bind myself for all future time never again to give my consent if the Hohenzollerns renew that candidature. I repelled him at last somewhat severly, for one may not and cannot make such commitments for ever and ever (a tout jamais). Naturally, I informed him that I had received no news as yet, and, since he had been informed earlier than I by way of Paris and Madrid, he could easily understand that my Government had no hand in the matter.

Since then His Majesty has received a dispatch from the Prince (Charles Anthony). As His Majesty has informed Count Benedetti that he was expecting news from the Prince, His Majesty, because of the above mentioned demand, decided, in consonance with the advice of Count Eulenberg and mine, not to receive the French envoy again, and informed him through an aide-de-camp on duty that His Majesty had received from Paris, and had nothing further to say to the Ambassador. His Majesty leaves it to your excellency to determine whether or not this new demand of Benedetti's and its rejection should not be communicated without delay to our representatives and to the press."

Bismarck's edited version of the Ems Dispatch sent to the German representatives and press reads as follows:

"After the news of the renunciation of the hereditary claim of the Prince of Hohenzollern had been officially communicated to the imperial government of Spain, the French Ambassador at Ems made an additional demand of His Majesty, that he should authorize him to telegraph to Paris that His Majesty the King bound himself for all future time never again to give his consent if the Hohenzollerns renew that candidature. His Majesty the King thereupon decided not to receive the French envoy again, and informed him through an aide-de-camp on duty that His Majesty had nothing further to say to the Ambassador."

130. Ibid., p. 483.
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May 1964