

Hello history friends and welcome to episode 19 of the FDW. Last time we brought you through the campaigning year of 1674, an eventful one by all accounts, and one which introduced us to several important issues, including the importance of Marshal Turenne to the French war effort, the French marriage to the Palatine family through Louis XIV's brother Philip, and the critical threat which the Rhine frontier posed to French security. We noticed during the course of the previous episode also that the French tended to defend along the Rhine, besiege in the Spanish Netherlands and exercise the bare minimum of resources along the Pyrenees, as the Mediterranean theatre began to heat up with a revolt in Sicily. In this episode, we are brought into 1675, as the war further evolves into the slugging match it would represent up until the peace treaty. I will now take you to early 1675...

Alliances are certainly good...but a force of one's own, that one can confidently rely upon, is better. A ruler is not treated with respect unless he has his own troops and resources. It is these, thank God, that have made me important since I have had them. Frederick William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg.¹

France had endured a solid year of campaigning, and with a rhythm apparently setting in as to how Louis planned to fight the so-called Dutch War, it seemed as though both Louis and the allies would wage war until either side was sufficiently disadvantaged. To strike a blow sufficiently damaging to Louis would involve a wider invasion of his lands, and the weak points of France remained along the Rhine, where the recently annexed Alsace provided ample opportunities for a would-be invader to cross through Strasburg and into the territory. Bordering Alsace was the equally problematic Lorraine, whose Duke Charles IV, as well as his son Charles V, remained at loggerheads with Louis and prepared to strike back at the French for seizing their lands. The Rhine had become particularly important as a defensive line once the Palatinate was occupied from early 1674. The rapacious policies of the French did not endear Paris to the Germans, and by the end of 1674 virtually all of Louis' allies had abandoned him – in the spring, Britain, and before the summer, the Bishop of Munster. Thus alone in the war which increasingly counted more concerned German princes on the side of the Emperor, whose eager troops would be set against him, Louis and his marshals needed a plan to both occupy the Germans along the Rhine and achieve victory against the Spanish and Dutch in the Netherlands.

¹ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (London, 2006), p. 48.

While Maastricht anchored the French hold on the region, this was the one bright spark, and French forces had been forcibly removed from the DR's territory by the spring of '74. It remained a balancing act for the French, as Louis planned to divert and apportion his armies to the two fronts in the SN and along the extent of the Rhine, under the command of the esteemed Marshals Conde and Turenne respectively. By the end of 1675 though, both Marshals would be absent from their respective commands, and a new phase of the war would be set in motion.

Our coverage takes us first to the SN, where the French continued to hold Maastricht within a pocket of otherwise questionably loyal territories. To ensure its supply, the French would need a steady stream of secure land from France into Maastricht, and this depended on Liege, both the lands and fortress of which had come increasingly under threat from the Spanish, who had launched numerous sorties from their domains since autumn of 1674, capturing the smaller fortresses around the more impressive Liege, and apparently preparing to take Liege itself. This would have prevented the French from supplying Maastricht, and with rumours coming in that the Spanish were attempting to court the city leaders of Liege over to their side with large bribes accompanied by threats, Conde was ordered into the region to ensure that it remained at the very least determinedly neutral. Eventually the threat was offset as the French moved sufficient forces into the region, but Louis XIV himself had bigger things planned for the spring of 1675 than a mere pressure campaign.

To secure the region against future threats, Louis planned to move with an army of 40k men, supported by Conde who was bound to a carriage because of his incessant gout, up the Meuse valley by following its tributary, the River Sambre, which flowed into France. By following the rivers, as they had before, the French could mop up all significant resistance and capture the most important fortresses, culminating in Limburg, to the south east of Maastricht. Not only would this campaign push the Spanish back from their recently gotten gains, but it would fulfil what Vauban had once advised Louis to undertake, and create a fence of iron around the French border, dotted with river based fortresses that both insulated France and boxed in the enemy. The River Meuse, which flowed in a kind of semi-circle around the SN, was the perfect measuring stick for the campaign, and it had served French fortunes remarkably well in the past. By seizing the fortresses along it, France would be able to supply an increasing number of its fortifications by river.

The problem with the campaign was the lack of forage, mainly because the lands had yet to recover from the previously devastating experiences, which saw much of the region burned in the early phase of the war as the French sought to take every possible advantage from the Dutch. To successfully campaign in this sensitive border area now would require vast supplies for Louis' 40k strong army, and this in itself would require heroic levels of organisation, the responsibility of which fell to the French minister for war, Louvois. For all his arrogance and pomposity, not to mention ineffectiveness as a negotiator, Louvois was a brilliant administrator, and his efforts had previously ensured French supply far earlier than expected, through the provision of vast consumables and other resources which could be stored in nearby fortresses. It sounds like a simple enough formula, but for the armies of the 17th century that lived mostly on the land, in circumstances and with results not far removed at all from the experiences of the TYW, the exercise of providing one's men with a home-grown supply of forage negated the need to spend time pillaging the countryside, meaning soldiers could focus on the task at hand. Lynn recounts that 327k bushels of grain was stored in Maastricht and Liege in the weeks before the campaign, granting Louis' ambitious force 80k rations every day while in the field.²

On 11th May 1675 Louis led his army along the Sambre, giving the impression that he planned to strike at Brussels rather than his intended targets. The Dutch and Spanish, not yet assembled for the campaign owing to their own want of forage and supply, could do little to halt the French while they awaited also the readiness of Prince William, the commander of allied forces in the region. William was suffering from an illness, and was thus unable to command allied forces as he would have liked. These two circumstances – the preparedness of the French and the utter unpreparedness of the allies – combined to hand Louis arguably the most satisfying campaign of his life so far. By now, it seemed, the French King had more than forgotten about the frustrating experience which was the Dutch war. Though William would appear with 40k troops of his own at the end of June, by then it was difficult to predict French movements, and the French moved into Brabant, pillaging it and avoiding a concrete siege altogether following their successes in taking their central objective of Limburg on 21st of that month. William became concerned that the French would move on Brussels, but instead Louis put the region under contributions, terrifying the local populace further, and used the monies gathered to break relatively even on his campaign. With the major objectives secured, Maastricht and Liege were insulated from allied attack, and Louis basked in his

² Lynn, p. 137.

success. Rather than act aggressively against William's army though, he peeled off divisions for Turenne's army along the Rhine – the time had come to split the troops to suit the circumstances once more.

If Louis' campaign along the Meuse and into Limburg had been a satisfying and gratifying display of his legend, Turenne's campaign along the Rhine was a less glamorous continuation of the previous year's campaign, which essentially involved attacking any allied army that ventured across the Rhine and into Alsace, thereby threatening French integrity along that large, troublesome river. The Rhine was a constant menace to French security, presenting as it did a number of holes, in the form of large fortresses, that the French would have to plug. Some of these, like Philipsburg, to the north, the French did own, but arguably the second most important river fortress, Strasburg, remained in Imperial hands. The experience of being invaded time and again through the bridgehead provided by this Imperial city would persuade Louis over the following years to seize the region in a nakedly aggressive land grab, but for the foreseeable future its presence required Turenne's constant attention as he tried to forestall increasingly ambitious allied incursions into France.

In a series of daring moves in the chess game along the Rhine, Turenne and his Imperial adversary Raimondo Montecuccoli crossed over pontoon bridges, sailed supplies downstream and captured important miniature strongholds in order to force their rival into a corner. The aim of Turenne was always to pin his rival against the river and defeat him, preventing him from invading across Strasburg into Alsace as the allies had the previous year. For a time it seemed as though Turenne was winning the game of manoeuvre, because Turenne was able to force the loyalty of numerous smaller German towns along the Rhine, which brought Montecuccoli further away from his own supply lines. By early July both armies were hurting from lack of supplies, with Turenne's horses reduced to eating leaves for want of forage, and the constant rains adding to the misery of both commanders. Eventually, Montecuccoli was forced to withdraw to the east for want of forage, and Turenne attempted to seize this chance. With both commanders on the right bank of the Rhine, it seemed as though a confrontation was finally imminent, and by mid-July it was learned that Montecuccoli had withdrawn to the town of Salzbach, positioning his men in the various buildings, in the streams and along the foothills which the town offered. It was not an especially advantageous position, but by the time Turenne caught up with his rival on 22nd July the defenders appeared more formidable. Turenne temporalized for a time as he weighed up whether or not to attack, but eventually did so.

As the cannon started firing, Turenne instructed his artillery commander to scout along the German line and see if a good location existed to place the French cannon. This artillery commander, a Jean Saint Hilaire, wore a red cloak that proclaimed his station, but it also presented a tempting target to those allied gunners capable of zeroing in on him. As Saint Hilaire reported back to Turenne, it became clear that the soldier's garb had given him away; cannon balls began to hit in and near his position. Just as Saint Hilaire turned to move, a cannon ball struck him, severing his arm. As he writhed in agony, Saint Hilaire would have been met with an even worse sight than that of his detached arm. The cannon ball had smashed through his arm yes, but immediately after it had struck another – Marshal Turenne. Cracking into the Marshal's stomach, the cannon ball essentially cleaved out the old commander's insides, ripping through his body and presenting a scene which was as grisly as it was tragic. Marshal Turenne was dead. Just like that, in a battle unremarkable in comparison to so many others, the marshal's luck ran out. Upon learning of his death his aides attempted to hush up the news, but word inevitably spread, even reaching Montecuccoli himself, who was said to have remarked on his old adversary 'Today died a man who did honour to mankind.' The French attack was repulsed from Salzbach and chased further west, though they withdrew in relatively good order to fight another day, crossing into Alsace by the end of July, and sending urgent messages to Louis that France's favourite Marshal had fallen while doing his duty.

Thus we come to Louis' decision to send troops from the SN, as well as, in time, Conde himself, south to reinforce the demoralised troops along the left bank of the Rhine, who now camped in Alsace. Sensing weakness, Charles V of Lorraine, the nephew of the late Duke who had died in August, affected a siege of Trier when the French withdrew into it, and by 6th September this important city north west of Strasburg was in allied hands. While Conde, now in position in Alsace, feared that Charles V and Montecuccoli would link their forces up, Montecuccoli busied himself with flipping back the previously French towns that the late Turenne had captured in the spring, before going into winter quarters early for the sake of his now exhausted troops. Conde, sensing that the campaigning was over, did the same. It had been an intense past few months, with relatively little gain along the Rhine – just how Louis wanted it. The loss of Turenne was certainly the most notable defeat for French arms, as historians tend to mark this as the moment when the French initiative along the Rhine lapsed. It is also worth noting that Conde, perhaps out of fear for his own life, retired after this campaign to his considerable estates, as did his Imperial rival Montecuccoli. Perhaps the

death of the venerable Turenne had given them pause for thought, or perhaps the supreme efforts of the campaigning season had simply taken their toll. Either way, with the old guard determinedly absent by the end of 1675, the armies on both sides looked to clear the cobwebs for the following year.

While this had played out, an intensely dramatic scene was also playing itself out much further to the east, in the lands of the Elector of Brandenburg, so long a flip-flopping thorn in the side of France. Determined to pull the GE's attentions away, Louis set in motion a plan for that Elector's domains which had been building ever since FW made himself a nuisance on the eve of the FDW. Under the command of the old Swede from the TYW, Gustav Wrangel, the Swedes were heavily induced by promises of subsidies to attack Brandenburg and plunder it as they had done a generation before. In April 1672, Sweden and France concluded an alliance, with France promising 400k reichsthalers of subsidies in peace time, to be raised to 600k in war time, for Sweden maintaining a 16k men strong army in her German dominions. Also, Sweden maintained good relations to the Dukes of Holstein-Gottorp south of Denmark. By September 1674, Sweden had enlarged her army to 22k men after France had increased the subsidies to 900k reichsthalers, which she threatened to withdraw if Sweden didn't use this army, stationed in Swedish Pomerania, for an attack on her adversaries.

The most significant aspect of this sideshow in the FDW wasn't so much the fact that Swedes were persuaded by promises of much needed subsidies to act; instead, the really notable fact was FW's behaviour. Now in mid mid-fifties and suffering the pain of gout as did many of contemporaries, FW learned of the Swedish invasion in December 1674, and promptly separated his force of 18k men from Montecuccoli's force. This separation was all part of Louis' plan to divide the allies, but it not even the scheming Sun King could have anticipated what Christopher Clark called the 'most dramatic military exploit' of FW's reign as Elector.³ 'I can be brought to no other resolution', remarked FW upon learning of the Swedish move, 'than to avenge myself on the Swedes.'⁴ Enlightening his subjects as to his approach, FW continued to send furious dispatches home to Brandenburg inducing them to resist the invader, the memory of whom remained fresh in the minds of some terrified Brandenburgers who had lived a generation before.

³ Clark, p. 44.

⁴ Cited in *Ibid*, p. 45.

‘Cut down all Swedes’ FW wrote in early May, ‘wherever they can lay their hands upon them’, adding orders ‘break their necks and to give them no quarter.’⁵ Moving as fast as he could, after having wintered his troops in Franconia, from May 1675 FW marched 160 miles in just under two weeks, taking the Swedes utterly by surprise and positioning his smaller army to attack Wrangel’s larger, intimidating force. After a small victory during a skirmish, the Swedes took up position at a town called Fehrbellin.



Depiction of the Battle of Fehrbellin.

Having advanced across Northern Germany on skis, as many of his soldiers were transported in carts pulled by their horses, FW had covered an incredible distance in record time, and now had the element of surprise. With the home advantage, FW’s men were guided by locals to block certain passages, and force the Swedes to form up at the aforementioned town of Fehrbellin. On 18th June 1675, FW faced 11k Swedes with only 6k men of his own, as he had moved so fast most of his army had yet to arrive, yet he recognised the advantages of the terrain, and seized a low hill across a river from the Swedish position, placing his cannon upon it. When the Swedes realised what the Brandenburgers were up to, they attacked up the hill with their cavalry, and thus the majority of the battle descended into this struggle, as the Swedes and Brandenburgers fought bitterly over the hill, with the entrenched Brandenburgers eventually winning the day. With the Swedish cavalry broken, FW’s cannon was able to pulverise the remaining Swedish soldiers, and as greater portions of his army linked up with him, he was able to pursue the broken Swedes, pushing them out of the Electorate altogether. By the 2nd July, FW’s territory had been rid of Swedes, and his legend had been cemented. Those Swedes who hadn’t been chased out of his lands were brutally butchered by the

⁵ Cited in *Ibid.*

citizenry, fed stories of Swedish excesses and eager themselves for revenge for the previous generation.

It is from this battle that FW's title, the GE was born. In dispatches to and from the various courts of Europe, while noting his significance action here and what it represented, Brandenburg officials held their Elector in a higher esteem than ever before. As Clark noted, FW is the only man of this era to retain 'the great' title he was saddled with, all the other attempts at applying such a title, to Louis or Leopold, proving less successful. So what did the victory actually mean for Brandenburg? FW was not finished with this victory, as the Swedish invasion had represented not merely a new campaign, but the beginning of what would be termed the Scanian War, and which would be waged parallel to the wider FDW, reflecting the fact that the beast originally released by Louis had definitively mutated into an uncontrollable monster. Louis' threats to withdraw his subsidies had compelled the Swedes to act, but by doing so they handed the baton of opportunity to their Danish rival Christian V, who was also induced to make war on the Swedes, pulling Stockholm into a two front war.



The Swedish Empire during its varied phases up to 1660

The emergence of Charles XI on the Swedish battlefield completed the picture of formidable men operating and distinguishing themselves during this era, and it is largely because of their efforts and legends that the campaigns launched during this period remain so fascinating. The 19 year-old Swedish King was thrust desperately into the command, in the hope that he would make like his ancestors and restore the now imperilled Swedish security. Charles' appointment seemed to do the trick, as he was able to frustrate Danish incursions into Denmark and effectively remove the threat which the Danes posed to Sweden's position there, though the Danes had better luck at sea. As we already know, to add to this triple image of reversal and triumph, the Brandenburgers seemed to have the Swedes' number of land, and would eventually push right into Pomerania, virtually removing the Swedish presence there by the end of the war. These victories further added to the legend of FW, who had not merely liberated Brandenburg from the invading Swedes, but removed the ancestral threat which they had posed to Berlin since first landing in Pomerania in the early 1630s. Though FW would bitterly lose these gains in the later peace, Brandenburg and its GE were able to ride high during most of the Scanian War, as the ambitions of Louis seemed to widen the conflict all across the continent, leaving only Bavaria without a dog in the fight, though the diplomatic campaigns there continued apace.

We will return to the issue of Scandinavia in the future, but before we close the episode we must bring our focus back to the considerable proposal and set of circumstances which led to Louis XIV's brother Philip marrying into the Palatine family, the same Palatine family, incidentally, which the French so ravaged from early 1674. Charles Louis, the Elector of these lands, as the second son of Frederick V, of the Winter King fame from the TYW, had gambled in previous years on being able to command the position of arbiter between the HR Emperor and France, but his position had evidently become more of a curse than a blessing. Elborg Forster, who we are all indebted to for bringing the story of Elizabeth Charlotte, or Lizelotte, to life through the translation and editing work of the Princess Palatine's letters, noted on the proposal of the brother of the French King to the strategically important but relatively unremarkable princess:

Charles Louis was extremely eager to conclude an alliance with the French royal house, for he hoped that such a marriage would not only establish his daughter in great splendour but also permit him, the Elector, to play the role of mediator between the HRE and France and, above all, to shield his own country from the potential aggression of its most powerful neighbour. It is not clear why Louis XIV agreed to this marriage between his brother and a rather poor and reputedly plain German princess, for in 1670 there was no reason to believe that the line of Pfalz-Simmern would die out in the foreseeable

future, thereby giving Philip's family claims to an inheritance in the Palatinate...After a great deal of evasion of the part of the Elector the dowry was fixed at 64k livres, a positively paltry sum when one considers that Monsieur's income at the time was almost two million livres a year!⁶

The unmistakable awkwardness which would have accompanied the lively Lizelotte's marriage to Philip made itself felt when the unfortunate bride learned of the invasion of her homeland. Remarking in a letter to her aunt the Duchess Sophie, the wife of the Duke of Hannover, made an Elector of his Duchy in 1692, Liz wrote on 22nd August 1674 that:

My first wish for Heidelberg must be that God may restore the blessed peace to use, else the porridge will become very dear in the good Palatinate if Monsieur de Turenne keeps taking away more cows, although I hope that [the Duke of Hannover] will now put a stop to this. Just now I am being called to go downstairs, for the King, the Queen and the Dauphin wish to call on me in passing; they are coming from Paris where a Te Deum was sung today for the battle the Prince of Conde won; he defeated the Prince of Orange's rear guard and took all the baggage trains and many prisoners...All of this is very well and good, but to speak quite plainly, I would prefer a good peace to all of this, for if we had that, our good Palatinate and Papa would find some rest.⁷

Though she would rarely comment on the nature of campaigns during her wealth of correspondence, Liz's letters shed an important light on society as much as what it was like to be a woman in the court of Louis XIV. Speaking of which, it is debateable whether by late 1675 Louis pondered himself whether, as Liz put it, he would prefer a good peace to all of this, even if the lines seemed to be holding and the Netherlands drew some triumphs. It remained to be seen, following this eventful year when the war spread into Scandinavia, the old guard retired from service and the Prince of Orange continued to take it to his adversary, whether France could maintain such a level of endurance, or whether the war for glory would ruin Louis' kingdom before sufficient levels of glory could be found. 1676, it seemed, would be a year of high hopes for both sides.

⁶ Elborg Forster, *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King* (1997, Baltimore MD), p. 5.

⁷ Cited in Forster, p. 11.