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Europe in 1870



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SWEDEN

Baltic Sea



EAST PRUSSIA

EASTERN POMERANIA

WEST PRUSSIA

MECKLENBURG-SCHWERIN

MECKLENBURG-STRELITZ

PRUSSIA

BRANDENBURG

RUSSIAN EMPIRE

ANHALT

SILESIA

SAXONY

THURINGIAN STATES

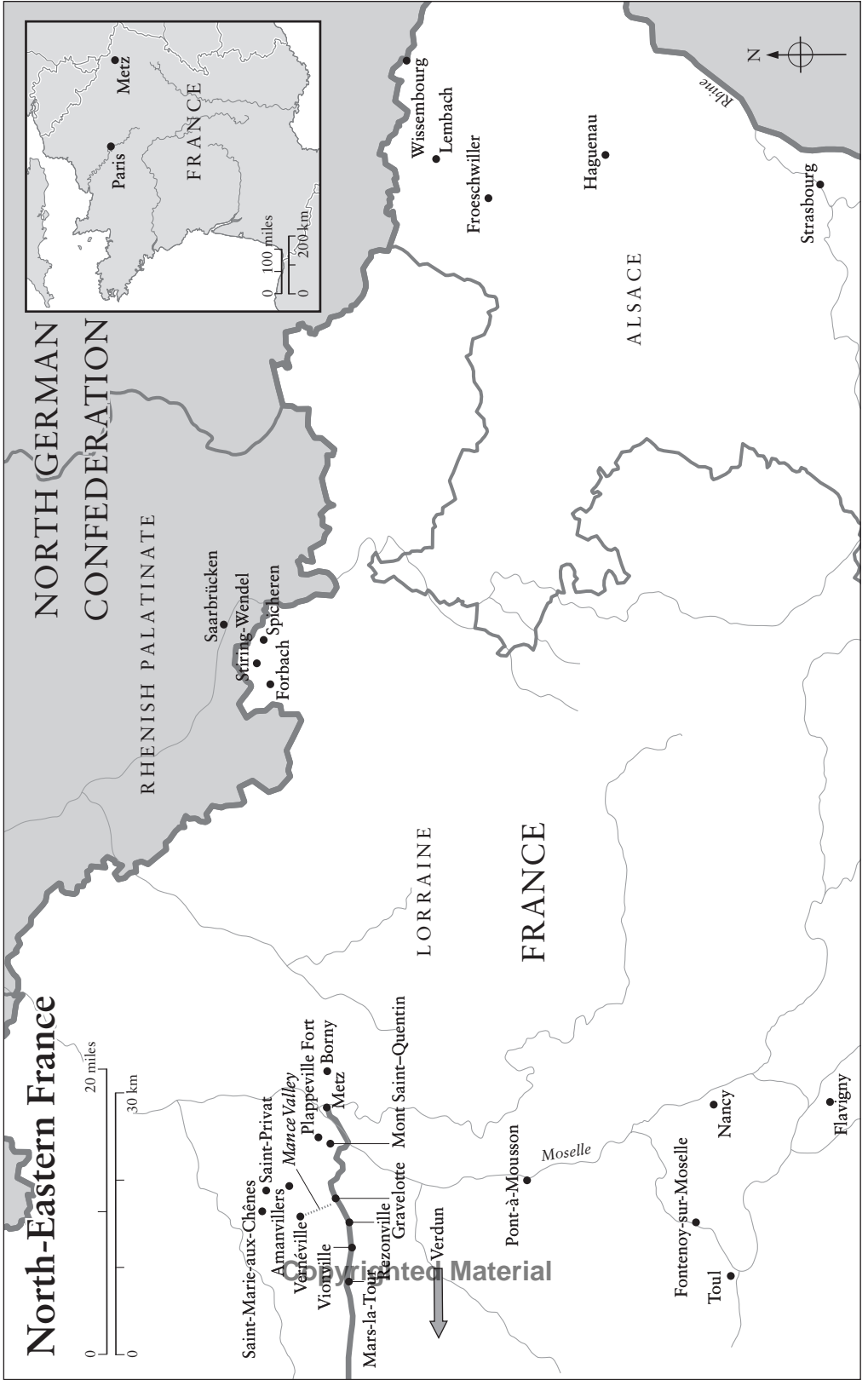
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Munich

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

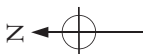
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Adriatic Sea



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The Road to Sedan



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Rheims



Paris

Camp de Châlons

Rethel

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Beaumont-en-Argonne

Stenay

Montmédy

BELGIUM

LUXEMBOURG

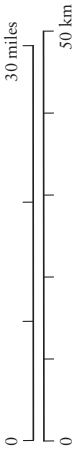
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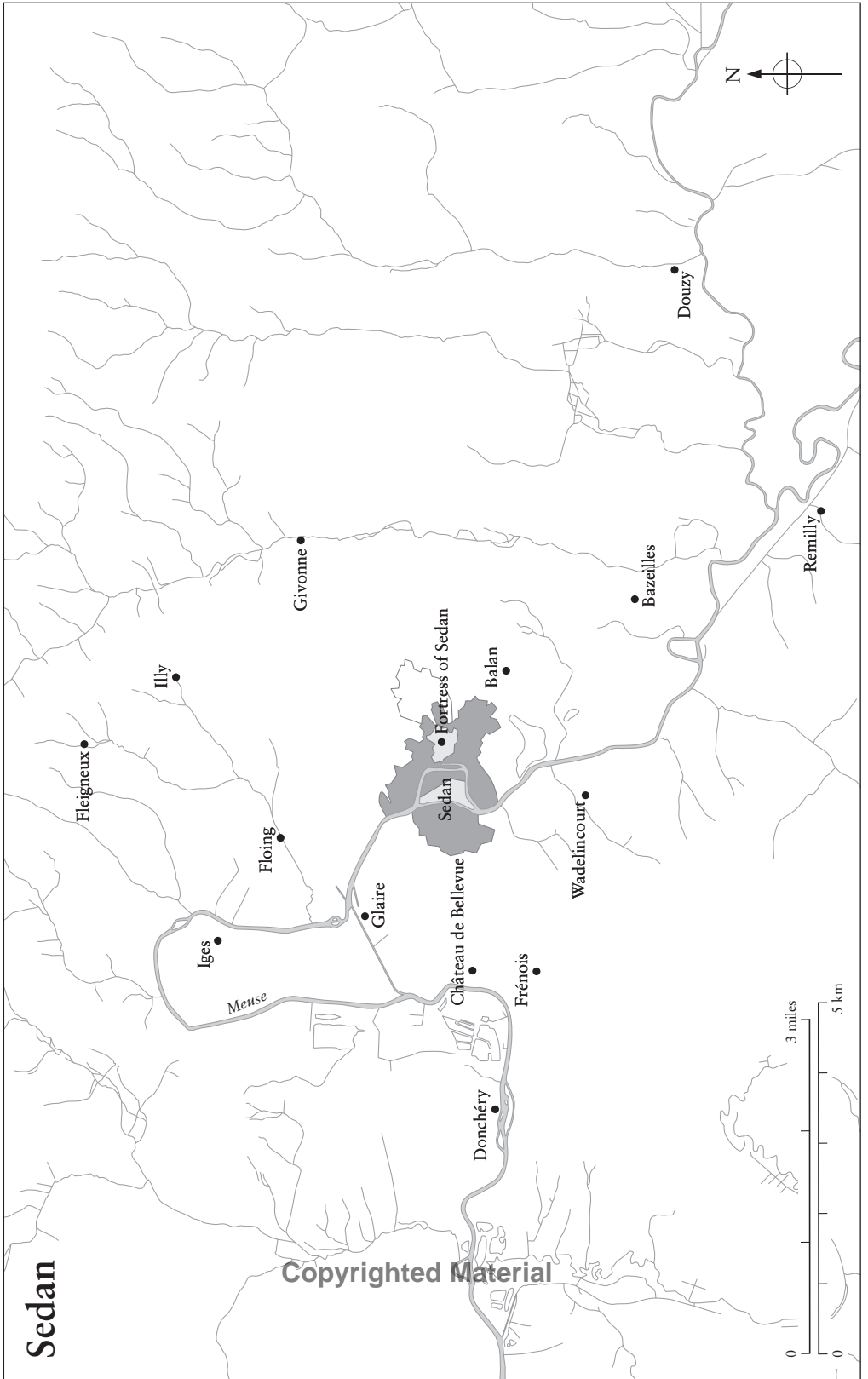
Verdun

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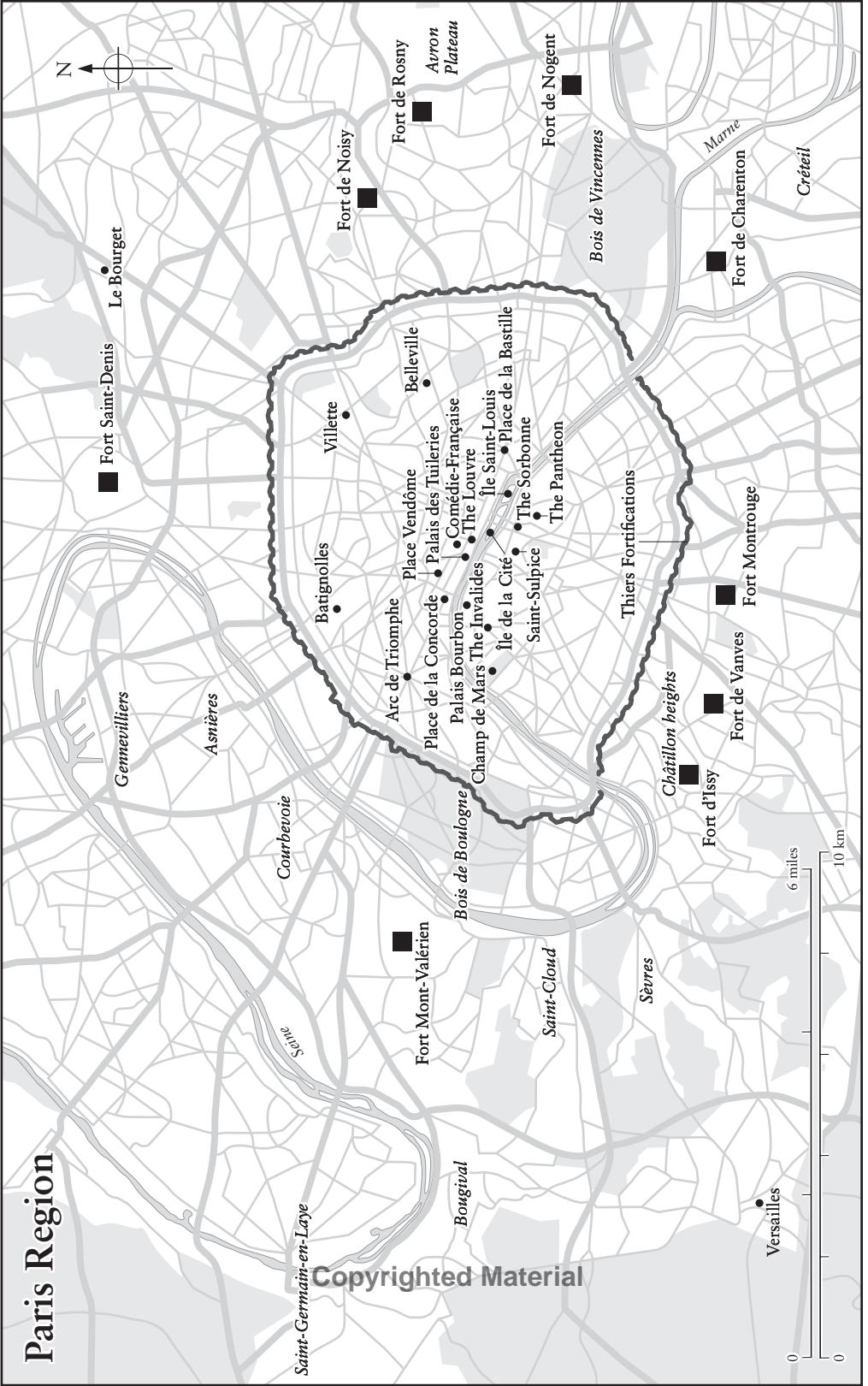
Bar-le-Duc

Meuse





Paris Region



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Introduction

The Franco-Prussian War transformed for ever the destinies of Europeans. It was the largest war in Europe between Waterloo and the Great War. Some two million soldiers took part, and more than 180,000 died. In this conflict, Germany unified, and France laid the groundwork for a lasting republic. It represented the decisive end to French dominance on the continent and the rise of Germany, in one of the most dramatic and one-sided defeats of any modern European army.

In July 1870, France declared war on Prussia, and soon faced a conflict with both the North German Confederation that Prussia dominated and the southern German states of Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg. France entered the war as an empire, headed by Napoleon III. After a series of bloody defeats, culminating at Sedan in early September, Napoleon III was overthrown in favour of a provisional, nominally republican government known as the Government of National Defence. Although the republicans attempted to continue the war, using volunteers to replace the wrecked and captured regular army, they proved to be no more successful than the Empire. Nevertheless, the German forces were now drawn into a six-month conflict that extended over nearly a third of French territory. In January 1871, the united German Empire was declared under Wilhelm I, and, shortly after, the French government finally agreed to an armistice.

This was not a war of angels. It featured nationalistic tribalism, poor leadership, unnecessary physical hardship, and spirals of violence that unfolded across the course of the entire conflict. Mobilized men and their families put their lives and ethical souls at risk for the sake of this dubious conflict. And this is what is so fascinating about the war: without moral clarity about the justness of their cause,

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individuals and townspeople had to navigate an uncharted landscape of war. Most tried simply to survive, while many strove to make something better than the reality the war presented to them.

We've largely forgotten this crucial war because of the decades of distance between us, the subsequent world wars and the creation of the European Union, which rests on the pragmatic relationship between France and Germany. Neither France nor Germany now includes this conflict among their favoured national histories.

Yet the Franco-Prussian War plays a foundational role in the world wars of the twentieth century. The war of 1870, with its large-scale, mechanized warfare that swept civilians up in a nationalistic conflict, anticipated the motivations, the assumptions and the emotional underpinnings of later conflicts. The line from Sedan to the Western Front was never a predetermined path, and still less complete are the linkages between 1870 and Vichy and National Socialism, yet the Franco-Prussian War provides a bridge from the Napoleonic Wars to the two world wars. It established the daunting challenge of how to face superior defensive weaponry, including long-range rifles, cannon and the early machine gun. It was both an era of global communication through telegraph and one in which orders were shouted on horseback. Armies moved by train yet could be lost to enemy reconnaissance simply by travelling beyond the horizon. The Franco-Prussian War contained novel practices as well. It was the first European conflict in which a nation housed thousands of prisoners of war and in which both parties had signed the Geneva Convention and allowed Red Cross volunteer organizations to care for sick and wounded soldiers. The war also featured the incorporation of colonial forces fighting on European soil and the advent of racialized army stereotypes in European conflict. Furthermore, it demonstrated the challenges of mobilizing a large population of citizen-soldiers over a broad sweep of territory for months at a time. Civilian administration, industry and manpower became disastrously embedded in service to the army.

The Franco-Prussian War also opened new questions about the role of civilians in western wars. The war represented the triumph

of universal conscription, war experience and invasion over the civilian claim to peace and normality. Citizen-soldiers contemplated the reality of killing other men and the possibility of being killed. National Guardsmen in Paris tried on the personality of the militarized soldier, while returning home to their families in the evening. The French use of *francs-tireurs*, or guerrilla units, re-opened the question of the appropriate relationship between civilians and soldiers, both in the field and as occupiers.

The war furthermore saw a great expansion in state powers and the ability of government to shape the circumstances of broad swathes of population. Paris became the first modern city to face both wartime shortages and random bombardment. German civilians living in Paris faced the suspicion and ire of French citizens and the French government. At the same time, again and again, individuals, towns and organizations were obliged to fend for themselves, to improvise their reactions to life and death situations for which there had been no state preparation and little guidance. Readers around the world avidly devoured newspaper accounts of the conflict from correspondents on the ground, fuelled by telegrams that could reach across the Atlantic. Newspapers in besieged cities such as Paris, Metz, or Strasbourg, cut off from the outside world, had to manage with scraps of rumours. Citizens formed fire brigades and sought to alleviate the suffering of their fellow countrymen.

The war of 1870 saw the remaking of political relationships both great and small, through violent actions and highly symbolic actions. Political fortunes were made and undone. The German states unified, contrary to centuries-old rivalries, in the fulfilment of German nationalism as a conservative, reactionary force. In France, the declaration of war represented a moment of national unity. Soon after, Napoleon III's Second Empire tumbled to ruins. The fissures in the French Left deepened, while the markers of social status flattened and re-formed under the stresses of invasion. For many, the war demonstrated the continuation of the reactionary peasant against the urban revolutionary. To Karl Marx, the siege of Paris and the Commune that followed were the true harbinger of socialism. To Giuseppe

Introduction

Garibaldi, the war pitted the Universal Republic against the forces of monarchism and clericalism. To Pope Pius IX, the war spelled the destruction of the temporal power of the Catholic Church.

Finally, the conflict between France and the German states was a war of emotions, from start to finish. Tight-lipped stoicism had no place in the Franco-Prussian War, except maybe for the Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. Memories of the war are replete with tears, outbursts of anger, wounded pride, oratorical flamboyance, pitiable suffering, quixotic charges and the literal bestowing of laurels. All this emotion undergirded a conflict in which impersonal bombardment, long-range rifles and devastating machine guns threatened to dehumanize civilians and soldiers on all sides.

1. *Declaration*

‘War! War with France!’ On 15 July 1870, the Munich native Dietrich von Lassberg, a twenty-two-year-old officer, thrilled to the announcement that Bavaria would soon join Prussia to fight against Napoleon III’s imperial army. His brother Rudolf, also in the army, was delighted at the news too, though Lassberg’s ‘mother and siblings did not share the joy’.¹ This moment of euphoria, of a Bavarian soldier exulting to fight alongside Prussians instead of against them, encapsulated the power of war to create unity.

The declaration of war represented a key turning point in a long path that, in the end, led to German unification. In the early nineteenth century, Germans seeking the national union of dozens of German states within the German Confederation (established by the Congress of Vienna in 1815) had aligned themselves politically with constitutionalism and liberal democracy, grounding their justification less in a common monarchy than in their German-ness. The dream of a German nation-state had come close to fruition during the revolutionary years of 1848–49, only to be undermined by division on the Left and crushed by reactionaries. In the decades that followed, the conservative Prussian statesman Bismarck threw his weight behind the effort to forge German unification under an authoritarian, Prussian, monarchy, rather than under a liberal democracy as planned by the earlier revolutionaries. In a speech demanding military preparedness at the Budget Committee of the Prussian House of Representatives, he declared, ‘The great questions of the time will not be resolved by speeches and majority decisions – that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by iron and blood.’²

Prussia undertook three wars in quick succession, now known as the Wars of German Unification. At the time, nobody, not even





Bismarck, had a precise plan mapped out. However, the Prussian minister-president shrewdly took advantage of diplomatic situations to play powers both great and small against each other. The wars were less about the direct conquest of territory and more about demonstrating to everyone involved the utility, or even the inevitability, of a Prussia-led unified German state that would heavily influence, but not completely overturn, the delicate balance of the five Great Powers.

First came the war against Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein, duchies that were ruled by the king of Denmark without being incorporated into the Danish kingdom. When the king created a new constitution that directly incorporated Schleswig into the kingdom in 1863 – unlike Holstein, Schleswig included Danish speakers and was not part of the German Confederation – Bismarck objected. He demanded a new constitution, and in 1864 the Danes fought back, assuming that France and Britain would join on their side against Prussia and Austria. The Danes proved friendless and were quickly defeated. The Treaty of Vienna gave Prussia administration of Schleswig, which afforded them the port of Kiel and a military corridor through Holstein, now under the administration of Prussia's tenuous and uneasy ally Austria. Not surprisingly, Prussia and Austria themselves now were headed for war.

That conflict erupted in 1866 and lasted just seven weeks. After securing the neutrality of Italy and France, Prussia marched into Holstein and left the German Confederation. The Confederation – including the states of Hanover, Saxony, Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg – then declared war on Prussia. The Prussians swiftly dispatched the Austrian and other German armies, notably at the crucial battle of Königgrätz. Bismarck ended the conflict quickly – before Moltke could send his troops to Vienna – to avoid intervention from third parties.

In the Treaty of Prague (1866), the dissolved German Confederation was replaced by the North German Confederation, a union of twenty-two states and principalities north of the Main river, with a Reichstag and dominated by Prussia, with King Wilhelm as president

(and king of Prussia, of course) and Bismarck as federal chancellor. Bavaria signed a treaty promising to ally itself with Prussia in case France attacked that state, and Prussia annexed Hanover, Frankfurt, Nassau, Hesse-Kassel and Schleswig-Holstein, too. But with Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg and part of the Grand Duchy of Hesse still outside the North German Confederation, it was clear to most observers that Bismarck would seek an opportunity to compel their incorporation, too – not through conquest, but through shared victory.

France provided the most likely target. After 1866, it was clear that, unless savvier leaders took the helm, France and Prussia were heading for conflict. The previous decade had left too many black eyes and bad feelings for Napoleon III to stomach any further ambitions on the part of Prussia. France had been embarrassed in Mexico in the early 1860s in its efforts to replace the Mexican Republic, sidelined in Poland in its struggle for independence from Russia, and brushed off for its neutrality in 1866. Amid that war crisis, Napoleon III had demanded (in vain) that, in return for his not intervening, Prussia allow France to annex Belgium and Luxembourg, a demand that Bismarck used to his advantage four years later.

In the early months of 1870, Napoleon III seemed to have solidified his position after over two decades in power. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Emperor Napoleon I, had led France since 1848. He leveraged his name and his claims to support the working class to secure election to the presidency immediately following the revolution of 1848 that had established the Second Republic. On 2 December 1851, he staged a *coup d'état* that dismantled the republic, and one year later he declared himself emperor, heading a regime known as the Second Empire. For years, he enjoyed widespread support among the upper classes and the peasantry, and fostered business and industry, banks and public works. Exports increased, particularly in the metallurgical industry and luxury goods. Entrepreneurs gained access to capital while French investors supported many major construction projects, including railroads and the Suez Canal.

The radical generation of 1848, devastated by Napoleon III's dismantling of the Second Republic, scattered into exile or retreated into private life. Nevertheless, despite Napoleon III's intentions to establish a Bonapartist dynasty, curtail free association and impose censorship, a broad republican culture developed during the Second Empire. Thanks to a strong economy that supported the growth of a middle class of businessmen and professionals, civil society blossomed in the 1850s and 1860s through Freemasonry, the Paris bar, universities, the arts world, as well as through Jewish and Protestant consistories.

Napoleon III maintained universal male suffrage (France was the only European country that could make this claim), while assuring that electors had few real choices. Ministers were responsible to the emperor himself, not to electors, and only the emperor could propose legislation. Napoleon III brought conservatives along by promising social order and by making peace with the Catholic Church.

In the 1860s, Napoleon announced his intention to create a 'liberal empire', in which he aimed to deflate the opposition by co-opting some of their goals. In 1860, France and Britain concluded a liberal trade agreement. Soon, the National Assembly had been granted the right to approve the national budget. Press and labour restrictions were relaxed. In 1868, Napoleon III permitted freedom of assembly, leading to a proliferation of clubs and associations. Rather than dismantle opposition, however, these changes provided additional means for republicans to garner support. Young idealists of 1848, now twenty years older and more experienced, still imagined a future where Frenchmen could freely elect their leaders, though the precise nature of that future remained highly contentious. A few opposition political leaders managed to gain seats in the Corps Législatif.

After an embarrassing 1869 election, the emperor proposed constitutional reforms granting significant power to the legislature. He then called for a plebiscite in May 1870, asking whether voters approved of the liberal reforms that had taken place since 1860. This

cunning wording neutralized the ability of voters to express the desire for more radical change. The May 1870 plebiscite therefore passed with a vote of 83 per cent, carried throughout France, except in Paris and Marseilles.

In the summer of 1870, then, Napoleon III's position appeared commanding, yet it was impossible to tell just how strong the opposition had grown. Furthermore, France in early July 1870 had no allies, no formal plans, and no clear military objectives.

The immediate war crisis began with conflict over the succession to the Spanish throne, with the guiding hand of Bismarck assuring that the crisis would support his goal of German unification under a strong monarch. It was Bismarck who encouraged the Spanish to offer the throne to Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a relative of King Wilhelm. And it was Bismarck, taking advantage of the moment to check French ambition, who made sure that the ensuing dispute between France and Prussia could not be resolved peacefully. Much as they had chafed against Habsburg encirclement in centuries past, the French objected to Prince Leopold's Spanish candidacy as an encirclement that threatened the European balance of power. The candidacy was withdrawn.

Yet, having stoked French public opinion in favour of war, many on the French imperial council did not have enough cover to back down, even if they had wanted to. The French foreign minister, the duc de Gramont, with the support of Napoleon III, pressed for a guarantee from Wilhelm himself, as head of the Hohenzollern family, that no similar future proposal would be made. This was a promise that no sovereign would make. King Wilhelm, in conversation at Ems with the French ambassador to Prussia, Count Benedetti, declined politely. Bismarck edited his response – known as the Ems telegram – to make the king's refusal seem more abrupt and insulting.

In Paris, meanwhile, the minister of war, Edmond Leboeuf, agitated for quick mobilization, and Gramont continued to aggressively seek an opportunity for war. The Council of Ministers decided to call up reserves on 14 July. In the Corps Législatif on the following

day, Gramont and Prime Minister Émile Ollivier presented the case for voting in favour of war credits. A few members of the opposition objected, notably Adolphe Thiers. Most, however, followed the tide of public opinion and the convictions of the ministers, and voted to support war credits, 245 to 10. France began to mobilize the next day, and officially declared war on 19 July.

In the days following France's war credits vote, a massive and emotional reworking of allegiances rippled across Europe. In fields and urban squares, through telegraph wires and off printing presses, in public proclamations and private conversations, those caught up in the conflict sorted out their alignments, both chosen and imposed. They learned to become enemies with some; newfound partners with others, or – in the case of non-belligerent countries – to tread a careful line of neutrality. For many in Alsace or in Bavaria, the re-conception of their allies as enemies and vice versa was incomplete and jarring.

News of France's vote on war credits reached Berlin on the afternoon of 15 July. An eyewitness reported that the news 'is received with fearful solemnity. Every cheek burns with suppressed indignation. There is resolution too.'³ A crowd awaited the arrival of the king from Ems, scheduled for 8.40 that evening, around the flag-bedecked train station and along Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse. The royal procession finally arrived bearing the king, the crown prince, Bismarck and Moltke. The crown prince announced the war to the crowd, which shouted its approval with hurrahs. One observer noted, 'There can be no doubt, the war henceforward will be popular in this country, and this means much. It means that everybody will act and make sacrifices for the country. It will be war to the knife.'⁴

Placards and handbills printed the mobilizations and were distributed around the city with the expectation that all would voluntarily co-operate. The four main railroads from the Elbe to the Rhine were stopped for private traffic and devoted to the conveyance of troops, so that – according to the plans discussed on 15 July – 240,000 men from the North German Confederation army would stand on

the Rhine within five days, followed soon thereafter by reserves. Prussia ordered a general mobilization – not a partial one – from the first day.

By eleven o'clock that evening, 'amazement has changed to joy. A whole city is intoxicated with gladness. Crowds go singing war songs, arm in arm, down the streets. Some shout, some laugh, and some indulge in witticisms.' In mockery of France's role in the diplomatic crisis over the crown of Spain, 'One man takes another by the throat, and cries: "My neighbor's daughter loves your nephew. He will have nothing to do with her; but if you do not declare that he will never marry her, I will knock you down."' ⁵ Lutheran hymns mixed with patriotic songs. The distance between piety and patriotism nearly vanished.

Across the German states, leaders rushed to show their devotion to the Prussian cause. In the free city of Hamburg, the Chamber of Commerce sent King Wilhelm a telegram expressing devotion to the honour of Germany, news that filled him with 'pride and tranquility'.⁶ In Breslau, 'stormy enthusiasm' erupted at the news.⁷ In the Grand Duchy of Hesse, part of which had joined the North German Confederation in 1867, the prime minister declared on 20 July that the German frontier had been breached. His call for war credits was warmly approved 'amid cheers for Germany, the King of Prussia, and the Grand Duke'.⁸ Even Frankfurt, the seat of the 1848 Confederation parliament that had lost its status as a free imperial city in 1866, now seemed to fully support a united Germany.

Of course, not everyone was convinced of an inevitable victory, though the extent of German opposition is difficult to measure. Popular opinion is not the same as the exuberant public opinion expressed in newspapers when the press was so firmly dominated by the National Liberals, who were pro-unification and heavily influenced by Bismarck. The National Liberal press moved swiftly to clamp down on negative articles regarding the war, so our evidence of German scepticism comes from other sources. Panicked selling of stocks in Berlin betrayed investors' real state of mind. In

Hanover – like Frankfurt, a recent Prussian acquisition – some ‘went their own way, grumbling and embittered, out of hatred for Prussia, and even sympathised openly or in secret with the enemy’.⁹ At first, the religious press and some sermons saw the war in the traditional religious interpretation: it was God’s punishment. The faithful should be penitent. The liberal press declared these sentiments unpatriotic, and this interpretation did not outlast early German victories.

Despite the treaties requiring the south German states to mobilize, there was room enough for doubt in the minds of many observers. South German neutrality remained a real possibility right up to the Ems telegram. Many in Bavaria wondered why they should send their sons to die over a Hohenzollern candidacy for the Spanish throne. The Prussian leadership worried that Napoleon III’s threat of a quick invasion of the southern German states would keep them out of the war.

After Ems and the French declaration of war, however, the neutrality party collapsed. Baden was won over easily: the government in Karlsruhe did not want to be occupied by the French, and so the government ordered mobilization immediately. By raising the possibility of a front on France’s eastern border, Baden complicated France’s ability to anticipate just where German armies might concentrate. The Grand Duchy of Hesse hesitated but soon also joined the coalition. Württemberg quickly turned against the French when the public learned of the Ems dispatch.

Bavaria was the hardest area to convince. Count Otto von Bray-Steinburg, the Bavarian minister of state of the exterior and council president, recognized that if the Bavarians remained neutral, or sided with France and lost, they would be treated harshly by Prussia, whereas if they sided with Prussia and lost, France would still want to maintain Bavarian independence. Bray-Steinburg therefore persuaded King Ludwig to mobilize. It was harder to sway the parliament. Eventually, by 101 to 47, the parliament voted 70 per cent of the requested amount of war credits but refused to declare war,

leaving that task to the cabinet. Bavaria went to war without a formal declaration.

The mobilization of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden clarified the nature and strength of the German position. 'By manifesting a readiness to identify herself with Prussia,' recorded one observer, 'Bavaria has done much to prove that the war, so rashly and unjustifiably provoked, is a war with United Germany. Such is the conviction, and it is a belief which is fully warranted by facts.'¹⁰ Despite these different levels of official enthusiasm, the German states shared in the common burden, sorrows and joys that arose during the course of the conflict, which rapidly built public sentiment in favour of a common German nation. This commonality diminished the particularism, customs and loyalties that until then had divided them.

In Munich, Dietrich von Lassberg busied himself at the barracks assisting with the departure. Lassberg took pride in the work and enjoyed the respect of strangers as he strode the streets of Munich. Arriving reservists were put on parade. Officers were named. Mobilization for these officers signified a moment of validation of the efforts they had made in the army during peacetime. With war imminent, some of them would receive appointments and prepared themselves to be worthy of them. The comings and goings of royalty ranked as a lesser importance. Lassberg does not even mention King Wilhelm's arrival in Munich, and he left for the front before Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm arrived.

Lassberg happily accompanied battalions as they made their way out of Munich via train and on foot, including a scorching hot march in new, unbroken boots to Tölz, due south of Munich. Then work in the camp at Tölz. Then a march back. On his travels he stopped to give a young lady a bunch of Alpine roses and edelweiss. He rejoiced as the people of the area blew them kisses and sang songs which lent a jaunty tempo to the morning. Upon returning to Munich, he gave his boots immediately to the cobbler. He had one day off in Munich on 22 July to make his personal parting visits and to let his feet recover.

Reality now set in. Lassberg realized that before him lay 'a big, unknown, perhaps even grim future. It was even possible that I would never see my family again. In the morning we went together to church and commended ourselves to God's protection.'¹¹ Lassberg's final day at home, 23 July, was difficult 'despite the joy of the advance'. Brother Rudolf left for the barracks at three o'clock that afternoon. They parted with the hopeful '*auf Wiedersehen in Frankreich*'. Lassberg spent the evening with his three youngest siblings, Berta, Franz and Georg (ten, eight and seven years old) to answer their 'funny and laughable questions' about the war, which remained for them, as for Lassberg himself, unimaginable.¹² Lassberg was not concerned that his own family might be affected by invasion, however, or by the diseases soldiers might carry. The next day, his departure from his mother's house at 4.30 in the morning, although 'tearless', was 'quite, quite difficult'.¹³ His mother made a cross on his brow, potentially her final blessing. At 6 a.m. Lassberg marched away, singing. His mother and siblings came to the train station to see him off with loud *Hochs* and *Hurras* as they parted. Lassberg did not yet know that he would soon fight in several key battles that shaped the course of Europe for decades to come. In the coming months, he witnessed and participated in acts of violence that he had never thought possible. The war against France soon became not just the adventure of the summer, but the defining year of his life. His family and his country would never be the same.

Not everyone was so pleased about the Bavarian mobilization. Some 360 miles north of Munich, in Potsdam, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm confided to his diary his disappointment at leading the Third Army with its South German contingents. It was, he wrote,

the most onerous of responsibilities, with these troops so ill-disposed towards us and quite untrained in our school, to have to fight so efficient an adversary, one, moreover, long since prepared against this

War, who will certainly invade South Germany long before those States are likely to be ready with their mobilization.¹⁴

Like many observers, Friedrich Wilhelm assumed that France would mobilize quickly and undertake the first offensive. He feared that he himself, a hero at the 1866 battle of Königgrätz, would be left out of the chance for glory.

For a week following the declaration of war, the crown prince remained in Potsdam and Berlin. He sang 'Ein feste Burg is unser Gott' at the Potsdam Garrison Church, visited his grandparents' graves on the anniversary of the death of Queen Luise, and prayed at the grave of his son Sigismund, who had died four years earlier at the age of two.

The crown prince marvelled at the enthusiasm for war and the unity across the board that he witnessed or heard report of everywhere, even in southern Germany. He did not hear of, or at least did not record, any reports to the contrary. Instead, he wrote, 'one may truly say that, in the face of wanton provocation of France, all Germany has risen like one man; it will very surely re-establish her unity.'¹⁵ Never before, and certainly not at the declaration of war with Austria in 1866, had he seen this open excitement and enthusiasm. His father the king travelled to Munich on 17 July to solidify the relationship with Bavaria. To Prussia's relief, the crowd greeted him with cheers, respect and uncovered heads. They sang songs of Germany unity, including 'Was ist des deutschen Vaterland'.

Still, the crown prince resented having been given the command of the South Germans, whom he intended to use as a reserve only. With this attitude he prepared to depart for Munich. The feeling of German antipathy – that 'us' versus 'them' meant 'Prussia' versus 'Bavaria' – was mutual. In Schweinfurt, Bavarian peasants cut down their green corn so that it would not be destroyed by the enemy marching through – that is, by the Prussians.

In Paris, demonstrations in favour of the war dominated. The 'Marseillaise' had been outlawed under the Second Empire, but now it

was re-authorized and, according to a police report, 'the enthusiasm of France to avenge so many years of humiliations is equal to that which existed eighty years ago to defend our borders' during the invasion of 1792.¹⁶ Senators leaving the Luxembourg Palace were greeted by a crowd of students crying '*Vive l'Empereur!*', '*Vive la Guerre!*' and '*À bas la Prusse!*' Deputies and citizens alike cheered Prime Minister Émile Ollivier. Whether at the Bourse, at the residence of the Prussian ambassador, Baron Werther, or at the *hôtel* of Ollivier on Place Vendôme, demonstrators seemed to know where to appear to acclaim the war. Ollivier occasionally stepped onto his balcony to acknowledge the cheers of the crowds. Civilians cheered soldiers as they headed to train stations and bought them drinks, and they went to the Tuileries Palace to await the departure of Napoleon III for the front.

The crowds surged through the boulevards and squares that Napoleon III had spent the past decades building up, stone by stone, into an urban showcase. Under the hand of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Paris had doubled the length of its thoroughfares and added some 85 miles of new streets, making it easier for commercial traffic to reach rail stations, docks and marketplaces. The streets created monumental vistas, crowned with prominent buildings. The city had gained two massive parks on either side, the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, along with numerous parks and green spaces inside the city. Underground, an upgraded sewer system paralleled the street above, designed to alleviate cholera outbreaks and the sense of disorder and social unrest associated with disease. Napoleon III had harnessed modern science and bureaucracy to create order and pacify the city.

The rebuilding of Paris pushed less wealthy Parisians out of the city centre and into the peripheral outer districts that had been annexed to the city in 1860, including Grenelle, Vaugirard, Belleville and Montmartre. These communities had their own sense of identity and belonging prior to their annexation, and these ties to place continued and strengthened as they transitioned from independent towns and villages to Parisian outer neighbourhoods. Both the city's

working-class people and large-scale factory environments were now separated from the increasingly wealthy and well-heeled inner districts. In this moment of the outbreak of war, reports did not capture dissent, even from these outer districts. Leaders had to personally witness these demonstrations in order to gauge whether they were about to face revolution, and newspapers reported on these events to convey to readers the level of popular support. But the consensus did not last for long.

For now, however, Parisians seemed united behind the cause of war. The *Constitutionnel* published a chilling account of the streets of Paris, of the cries for 'Blood!' in the streets, where 'vast surging crowds, and warlike cries and snatches of the "Marseillaise," the "Chant du Départ," and "Mourir pour la Patrie," are resounding on all sides.'¹⁷ But a young child – wrote the *Constitutionnel* – identified the contradiction in terms embedded in cries of *Vive la Guerre*. If *guerre* means killing, and *vive* means living, the child asked, how can you say, 'Live Death?' The *Constitutionnel* ended with a look to the future: 'Is it out of the mouth of this "babe and suckling" that the philosophy of the twentieth century is foreshadowed?'¹⁸

Parisians feted soldiers as they arrived at the Gare de l'Est and prepared for departure. On 16 July, the first to depart started to arrive at the train station around two o'clock, a little too early for their 4.15 departure. Civilians convinced them to break ranks and join them for a drink, leading to a certain amount of chaos as soldiers were hoisted up on enthusiastic civilian shoulders and lost track of their equipment. In large provincial cities across France, patriotic demonstrations heralded the departure of soldiers: in Perpignan, Nîmes, Lille, Tarbes, Amiens, Dijon, Le Havre. As trains travelled through towns, townspeople greeted the passing soldiers with bread, beer, and wine. Many across France expressed optimism as they marched off to war.

Few voices spoke in explicit protest. The extreme Left, seeking a democratic republic, voiced its opposition. Legitimists, who sought the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, were divided over the war and mistrusted the outbursts of patriotism, which recalled the

days of revolutionary violence. Moderate republicans stayed quiet. French Protestants, a small minority, expressed dismay at taking up arms against their co-religionists. They vainly pointed to visits from Prussian Protestants during the Exposition of 1867, and the king of Prussia's celebration of Pentecost at the Lutheran Church of the Billettes in Paris.

France enjoyed social stability as the country mobilized, but the economic impact could already be felt. On both sides, the conflict caused a sudden loss of trade. Agricultural products, metal and machines no longer flowed from the German states to France, and French exports to Germany, which thanks to textiles had quintupled during the Second Empire, came to a halt. Industry suffered, though unemployment was attenuated by the fact that so many men were mobilized for war.

For those who worked on the land, the primary concern in July 1870 remained the harvest and fear about what might happen if soldiers passed through. The prefect of the Orne noted that 'everyone is on the task . . . old men, women and children take up the sickle, for there is not a moment to lose.'¹⁹ A long-term drought, hard on peasants since 1868, was also a factor and increased worries and distress. There had been little rain for six months. With lakes almost dry, it was difficult to water and grow crops for animal feed. Peasants resigned themselves to selling off stock at depressed prices.

Along the border with the German states, the declaration of war raised conflicting emotions, particularly in the French region of Alsace that lay along the Rhine as it flowed from the Alps to the North Sea. Since Roman times, the Rhine had served less as a border than a place of connection and a passage for both people and goods. The Alsace region nevertheless had long been a site of contention. Controlled by France since the era of Louis XIV nearly two centuries earlier, it contained many German speakers and Protestants.

Strasbourg lay at the crossroads of this region, a culturally thriving fortress city whose inhabitants did not fall into neat boxes of national identity. Many spoke both French and German or its close

cousin, Alsatian. Protestants could be French speakers and Catholics could speak Alsatian. Many Alsatian speakers identified with the revolutionary traditions of France and had themselves participated in the revolution of 1848. They could not imagine themselves under the control of the Prussian monarchy. To complicate matters, people from Baden crossed the border into Alsace on a regular basis to work and live, and intermarriage between Alsatians and Badenese was common.

The news that France had declared war on Prussia therefore brought mixed reactions in Strasbourg. Soldiers and civilians mingled in the squares and in the city's many brasseries. Dr Henri-Étienne Beaunis recalled, 'What enthusiasm and what festivities! . . . The handshakes of men, the smiles of women, the encouragement from all parts.'²⁰ Some saw the conflict as the continuation of hostilities between Catholics and Protestants. Catholic children in Strasbourg teased Protestants that they would soon take their homes away. Protestants bristled when the local bishop's prayers implied that only Catholics would fight loyally for France. When a Protestant pastor attempted to send New Testaments to soldiers marching for war, police confiscated the tracts and arrested the men involved, claiming that the operation was really a cover for spies sharing sensitive information. 'Tracts', stated the police, really meant '*zouaves*' (a class of light infantrymen) and 'New Testaments' indicated 'cannon'.²¹

Others debated whether to stay or leave. The border city might be safer than the fields outside where battle was believed likely to take place. Yet a fortress city could be besieged, with the inhabitants subjected to starvation, bombardment and sacking. One woman recorded in an anonymous diary her struggles to determine the best course of action for her young children, frustrated that 'there are nevertheless some misfortunes no mortal can anticipate.'²² After considerable debate, she and her children returned from their summer retreat in the countryside to Strasbourg to try their luck in the protected city. War seemed unimaginable to her, despite the growing presence of French soldiers preparing for combat elsewhere.

She could not fathom that 'all these handsome men [would be] killed or wounded'. After a lifetime of peace, she recorded, 'when you do not know what war is, these ideas cannot come to mind.'²³

By the end of July, most areas across France had become determined to fight the war, despite their personal struggles, some with simple acceptance, and others with true enthusiasm. By early August, anxiety had given way to open displays of patriotism and militarism. The war between rulers had become a war of nations.

In the frantic month of July, both before and after the declaration of war, France desperately sought allies, while Prussia was determined to keep the other powers out of the conflict. A flurry of diplomatic cables clarified the position of countries across Europe. One by one, powers great and small declared their neutrality, and Bismarck reaped the rewards of years of careful diplomacy. The issues we associate with the start of the Great War were already present in 1870: secret treaties, Belgian neutrality, and America's interest in French democracy. The question is not just why the Great War drew in all the Great Powers, but why the Franco-Prussian War did not.

Declaring neutrality regarding another country was in itself a declaration of strength. Holland, Sweden and Norway had the ability to declare their neutrality, whereas Luxembourg relied on France and Prussia to declare they would respect the tiny country's borders.²⁴ With so many competing interests and relationships, it was little wonder that wires sometimes crossed. The British Private Secretary's Office in Simla, India, received the following two telegrams. From London on 18 July: 'Announced that Russia joined Prussia.' From London on 19 July: 'Following correction just received from Telegraph Office, Bombay: – Word *rumoured* was omitted yesterday's telegram before words Russia joined Prussia.'²⁵ Russia confirmed its neutrality within a week. Its interests did not seem to be threatened by the conflict, and Russia had valued Prussian support against the Polish uprising in 1863.

Austria still resented that France had fought alongside Piedmont-Sardinia in 1859 in the Italian province's struggle for independence

from the Habsburg Empire. More recently, Austria – through its foreign minister Friedrich von Beust – found the duc de Gramont's remarks in the 8 July Corps Législatif too threatening and France's declaration of war too presumptuous. For any alliance to occur, Prussia needed to appear to be the aggressor, and this did not seem to be the case. In any event, Austria had been militarily crushed by the Prussians only four years before and did not feel able to respond to this potential opportunity for revenge, at least not without a clear sign that France would emerge victorious. Austria declared neutrality on 20 July.

Similarly, Italy did not back Victor Emmanuel's informal statements of support for Napoleon III, not with French soldiers still in Rome protecting the Pope's sovereignty from the Italian state. In Florence, many remembered that Italy had lost Savoy and Nice to France in 1860 and that Prussia had supported Italy in 1866. Napoleon III received, at best, tepid support.

Britain was unlikely to join in active combat, yet the war crisis raised questions about its stance. Since the end of the Crimean War in 1856, Britain had pursued a policy of neutrality and non-intervention in Europe, especially after the death of the prime minister, Palmerston, in 1865. Queen Victoria, who had always maintained an interest in the German states, wanted to intervene in favour of peace. She appealed personally to King Wilhelm, without success. Lord Granville, who had become Secretary of the Foreign Office in early July, was also surprised by the explosive force of the Spanish succession crisis.

The British press split in its position on the war, with *The Times* and the *Daily News* blaming France for the conflict, and the *Standard* and the *Post* laying responsibility at Prussia's door. In Ireland, a 'monster demonstration' took place in Dublin in favour of France and the Fenians.²⁶

To one British writer, the whole affair proved nothing but the confirmation of the bankruptcy of authoritarian rule,

by the fact of two great nations being plunged into war by the headstrong passion of the almost absolute rulers they were foolish

enough to allow to govern them. With a Republican government as a proper representation of the people, the war of 1870, which has disgraced modern civilisation, and called down the wrath of heaven, could never have happened.²⁷

Another British observer asked,

How long is Humanity to suffer from these vast national duels, engaged in for no adequate objects and conducting only to the glorification of certain military and political chiefs? How long are the toiling masses of every nation to endure conscription, tyranny, and taxation, in order that soldiers and diplomatists may be enabled to gratify their insane love of glory or exact vengeance for the wounds inflicted on their monstrous vanity?²⁸

The British stayed out of the war after Bismarck revealed the secret demand that Napoleon III had made in 1866 for Belgium and Luxembourg. On 25 July, the story broke in *The Times* of a draft treaty dating from 1866 between France and Prussia in which France would support a united Germany under Prussian auspices and excluding Austria in exchange for Prussia's support in the French acquisition of Luxembourg and Belgium. This news raised the possibility that Britain might need to enter the conflict to defend Belgian neutrality.

Two days later, the French *Journal Officiel* acknowledged that some of the topics had been discussed in 1866 but denied that such a treaty had ever been written down. 'Ollivier declares,' reported Reuters, 'that he attaches great value to the confidence and friendship of England and that he always considers the union of France with England most essential to the condition and progress of the world. – He earnestly requests contradictions of the false reports which have been spread by persons desirous of dividing them.'²⁹

In August, the British signed a double treaty, one with France and one with Prussia and the North German states, guaranteeing Belgian independence and obliging the British government to intervene

militarily if either side invaded the country. Simultaneously, Parliament approved a bill to strengthen naval and military forces by 20,000. However, France bought arms from British suppliers, which the British Cabinet did not prohibit, to Prussia's anger.

News of the conflict travelled to the United States via the transatlantic cable, which had become a feature of communication just four years earlier, in 1866, when a robust and long-lasting cable replaced the short-lived cable first established in 1858. On 15 July itself, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, James G. Blaine, read a dispatch announcing the declaration of war in the House, to the applause of many members. But the French envoy to the United States, Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol, was unable to accept the war. An author, journalist and member of the Académie française, Prévost-Paradol had believed in the possibility of a liberal empire and had therefore accepted his position in Napoleon III's empire despite the disapprobation of his republican colleagues. He shot himself on 19 July and died soon after.

American sentiment at this point favoured the German states. The large number of Germans who had migrated to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century retained their connection to and interest in their homeland, including through both family and strong commercial ties. In Cincinnati, a city with a substantial population of German immigrants (many of whom came from Bavaria), a mass meeting of Germans expressed enthusiastic sympathy for Prussia. Already by 20 July, in major cities, German societies took subscriptions for the relief of widows and orphans.

Americans also held favourable views of Germans, whom they evaluated in light of their own recent civil conflict. The *New York Post* on 12 August hailed German progress and German greatness, due to internal commerce, compulsory education and a faith in German military training

whereby all, regardless of rank, wealth, or position, were required, as part of the duty of citizenship, to acquire a military education. If

the German soldier is to-day a better man than his French antagonist, it is not that he is braver, but that he is better educated; it is because he is like our own northern volunteer, a man, a citizen, defending his home, and knowing and caring wherefore he fights.³⁰

Moreover, the figure of Napoleon III was extremely unpopular in the United States. The emperor stood for dynasty as opposed to democracy and nationhood. The press believed that Napoleon was undertaking the war for his personal gain at the expense of the people who would be called to fight and die for the Bonapartes. Although many in the American press felt an affinity for France, they resented the emperor for overthrowing the Second Republic in a *coup d'état* and saw the war as another means for crushing republicanism. They did not closely examine the politics of Bismarck and the Prussian monarchy and remained poorly informed about political controversies in Prussia in the 1860s, in which decentralized aspects of the Prussian military were put under central control. The US press favourably viewed the Prussian system that mobilized citizens instead of professional, hired soldiers. Germany seemed to Americans to be a land of religious freedom and cultural depth, of industry and intelligence.

Furthermore, France had not supported the North during the Civil War, which felt like a rejection of the bonds built with Lafayette during the American war for independence. Support for Napoleon III came almost exclusively from newspapers that had supported the Confederacy. By contrast, Germans had taken out US war bonds, and King Wilhelm and Bismarck had sent the North three telegrams of congratulation. As President Grant lamented in an interview with the *Sun*, 'Not one [telegram] came from Napoleon, who, on the contrary, was attacking us in Mexico' – though Grant appreciated that the Mexican adventure had eaten up supplies that otherwise might have gone to the South.³¹

Whichever way the politics ran, the prospect of war on the Continent also opened some practical possibilities, particularly as the United States struggled to rebuild from its own civil conflict.

President Grant hoped the war would drive Americans abroad back home to advance industry – iron, leather and coal – and allow Americans to compete more favourably with Europe as the war drove up the cost of labour and prices. ‘They will no longer be able to make a coat cheaper in Europe than in this country,’ he anticipated. ‘Our factories will start again. Importations will cease . . . Our breadstuffs and bacon will have to furnish their quartermasters’ department indirectly.’³² Investments, he hoped, would shift from Europe to the United States almost immediately.

The declaration of war raised fears for German civilians living in France. ‘An infinity’ of Germans lived in Paris in 1870, according to Louis Bamberger’s 1867 *Paris Guide*.³³ The 1866 census put the number around 34,000, the largest population of foreigners out of the 2,150,916 total inhabitants of Paris. Recent researchers estimate the number of Germans in Paris to have ranged between 60,000 and 120,000 over the course of the nineteenth century. As many as one in twenty Parisians were German. By contrast, few French had settled in German territories. French statistics state that there were 6,429 French in Prussia, and fewer elsewhere in the North German Confederation, primarily women working as domestic servants, housekeepers, language teachers and governesses.

German immigrants to France came from across the German states, particularly from the south – Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg – and from all backgrounds and social groups, both affluent and impoverished. A street sweeper in Paris was likely to hail from Hesse. Their numbers doubled between 1851 and 1866 while the French population held steady at about 38 million. Germans held the papers and passports of the individual states from which they came, but there was linguistic homogeneity and alliances and treaties that bound them together – the Zollverein (customs union) and the Treaty of Gotha (1851) dealt with the economy, citizenship, naturalization and expulsion. They were often treated as a single group, as ‘Germans’ or ‘the German community’ or, more menacingly, ‘the German army’. Once the war began, this simplification became

more extreme. Along the Rhine, the relationship between neighbouring Alsatians and Badenese suddenly altered. Instead of brothers who worked and lived together, despite Alsace's years of incorporation into France, they now became enemies. Badenese prepared to invade Alsace as parties to a conflict between Prussia and France. Across France, Bavarians, Prussians, Hessians, Badenese and others, whose religious differences, cuisine and accents might have differentiated them, now disappeared. In the eyes of many French, they were all just Germans. Or rather, they were all considered to be Prussians. Unification happened not only in the eyes of the Germans but also in the eyes of the enemy.

As diplomats from Prussia, Saxony and elsewhere pulled out of the French capital, those from the North German Confederation appealed to the US Department of State to protect their citizens. The American ambassador to Paris, Elihu B. Washburne, noted in his memoirs that he had no precedents to follow and viewed the situation as 'very difficult, as well as responsible and embarrassing', for 'no particular rule had ever been laid down under such circumstances'.³⁴

In an official announcement on 21 July, the French government allowed Germans to live in France so long as they did not raise trouble. German schools remained open and German-language Protestant services were held. Prussians and their allies would not be allowed into the country without an extraordinary permit. These policies were similar to the ones applied to Russians in Paris during the Crimean War and to Austrians during the war of 1859.

On that same day, however, Washburne wrote to the duc de Gramont to suggest allowing subjects of the North German Confederation to depart. It would be more 'modern and more humane' to permit their departure rather than view these men as 'enemies of war'.³⁵ Presumably Washburne believed that Germans would be better off at a safe distance from the French population and closer to their native homes and families. Just two days later, on 23 July, Washburne became overwhelmed by the number of German citizens seeking safe-conduct documents so that they could leave

France. The ambassador asked Gramont's advice on how to handle these numbers. In response, the latter now limited the populations of Germans that he would allow to leave. Only women, children and those men who were over the age of forty – and therefore no longer eligible to serve in the army – were given safe-conduct. Regrettably, the order preventing German men aged twenty to forty from leaving was not published. Therefore, many German men headed to the French border only to be turned back into French territory.

Washburne objected to this change in policy. Although Gramont assured him that these German men of service age would be treated fairly and with respect, Washburne believed that Gramont had violated 'all the well-established principles of public law'. The French action, he argued, represented a new step contrary to the law of nations as presented in Emmerich de Vattel's *The Law of Nations* and James Kent's *Commentaries*.³⁶ Gramont disagreed. He swore that this order would not be accompanied by additional repressive measures. The foreign minister did not plan a blanket arrest of immigrants, as had occurred with Englishmen during the Napoleonic Wars and which later became common practice during the Great War. Furthermore, Gramont cited legitimate concern about German patriotic enthusiasm. The demonstrations widely reported from across German territories fed his fear of these potential expellees swelling the ranks of the German armies.

The legal ground for migrants had shifted. Jurists reasoned in this period that state sovereignty overrode any consideration of individual liberty or international law, which were nascent and flimsy at best. The French state claimed it was free to decide who would stay within its borders, and in a time of war, the nationals of the enemy state constituted a threat. In the past, enemy nationals posed a threat as spies or as smugglers of contraband. Now, for the first time, the threat came from the practice of mass conscription.

As wars increasingly were seen as conflicts between nations rather than between princes or monarchs, it became expected that the nation – that is, male citizens – would fight against the enemy.

While states agreed to grant foreign nationals legal equality when it came to property or personal safety, they did not extend this same equality when it came to the right to remain within their borders in times of international conflict. At this stage, the value of the people's war was so strong that the lawyer and republican opposition leader Léon Gambetta argued that German men of military age must be allowed to depart so that they could honourably engage in the war; patriotism, including German patriotism, overrode national security.

Although Gambetta's view did not prevail, his opposition to Gramont's policy demonstrates the firmly planted belief that a German man would put service to his state over his personal daily interests. In a very short span of time, millions of French and German individuals came to terms with their new wartime alliances and the emotional commitments demanded of them. Next, they prepared to move.

2. *Mobilization*

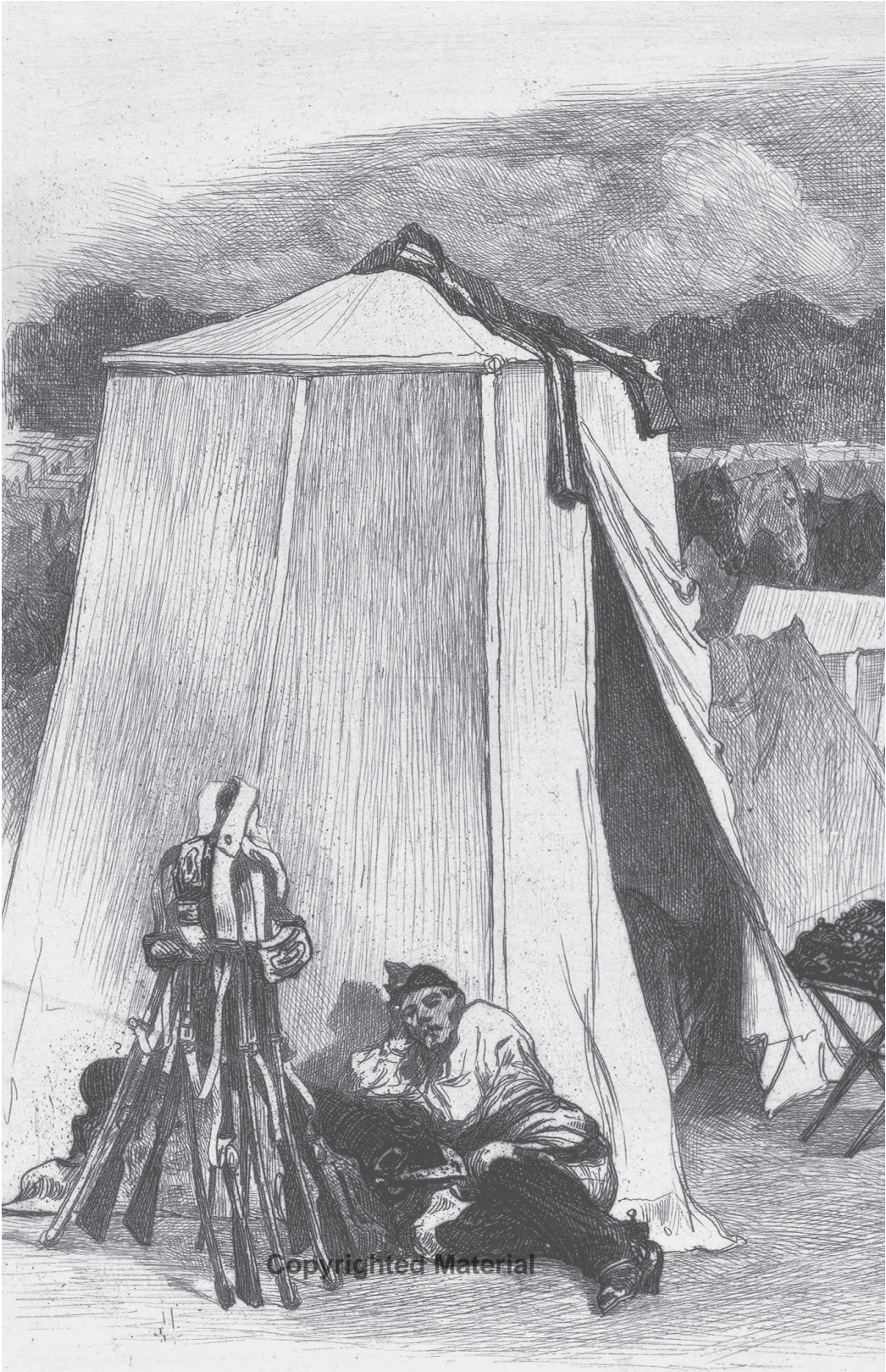
Mobilization is an immense logistical challenge, a public relations game, and a feat of emotional management. It entails the movement of men as well as the expansion of training facilities, the preparation of weaponry that is currently in storage, and the issuance of equipment following a pre-determined calendar. In 1870 mobilization happened not only to soldiers: it was an event that soldiers and civilians experienced together. For reservists and regulars alike, leaving for war symbolized the opening of horizons and a new and exhilarating experience that they wanted to share. After all, despite the large standing armies, this was a conflict in which civilian-soldiers went to war. Across France and the German states, hundreds of thousands of men prepared for departure.

Departure for where? For the front, for the scene of battle, for the battlefield? None of these terms were technically correct; they departed, rather, for barracks first and from there to villages and farmers' fields, for woods and pastures. No battlefields or fronts yet existed. They would come into being only with the concerted arrival of men who had the intention of asserting their control over a particular segment of land and, more pointedly, of forcing another mass of men on the other side to yield.

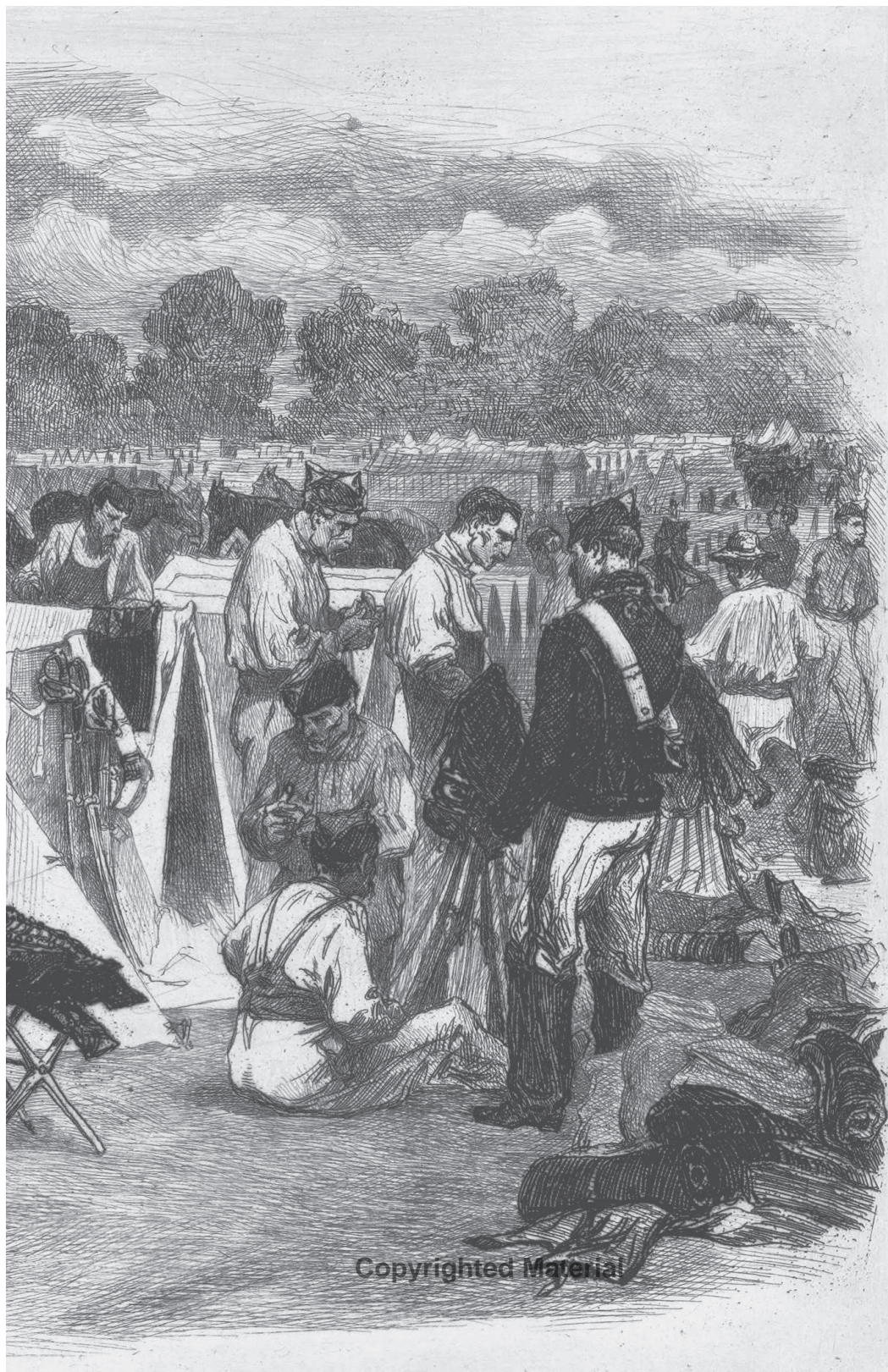
Within three weeks, over 304,000 French and 426,000 Germans had gathered on either side of the border. At the end of July, the British diplomat R. B. D. Morier, in Darmstadt, reported back to Lord Granville: "The present war is one without parallel in the history of civilized nations . . . An entire people has been suddenly called from its daily avocations to take a personal part in a struggle, which promises to be the bloodiest and most deadly on record, and in comparison with which, that of 1866 was mere child's play."¹

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At the outset, neither side had an advantage to mobilization, and Prussia had needed to catch up to France's already superior numbers. Everyone expected France to take the offensive; otherwise, why would France have declared war? The only question remained whether the French would attack via Strasbourg, crossing east into Baden, or head north along the left bank of the Rhine. As it turned out, however, France faced systemic difficulties with moving men into position, especially reservists, and these challenges were exacerbated by a key last-minute change in the army structure and a lack of auxiliary personnel.

On 14 July, General Edmond Leboeuf, the minister of war, declared 'We are ready, very ready!' and supposedly added 'Down to the last gaiter button.'² Gaiter buttons are necessary yet showy, and this statement, in quote-ready form, made it all too easy for critics to later accuse the French army of focusing on out-of-date displays rather than on the fundamental needs of the army as it mobilized for war.

Leboeuf planned on five days for drafting and sending out prepared call-up slips, then three days for reservists to get to their departmental capitals, then two days for their travel to the regimental depots, followed by five days for men to be equipped and sent to the active areas. On that timetable, the French would be ready for battle by the end of July. The French army counted on its ability to fight hard when it mattered to overcome any deficiencies in leadership at the top and in rear logistics.

In this plan, France did not separate mobilization from concentration, and this lack of distinction created logistical problems up and down the line. Since 1858, France had been divided into six territorial *commandements* known as the *corps d'armée* that followed departmental lines. The leadership structure was based on territory, and leaders only controlled the troops who happened to be stationed in their area. This organization bore no resemblance to a wartime footing in which great units are formed out of elements that come from all over France to muster themselves in strategic areas and are led by new leaders, unknown to their men. If a separation of mobilization