

**A** Musée  
de l'Armée  
Invalides

**EXHIBITION** 13 APRIL 2017  
30 JULY

# **FRANCE GERMANY 1870-1871**

**WAR, COMMUNE AND MEMORIES**  
**EXHIBITION BOOKLET**





► **Eagle from the Flag  
of the 21st Line Infantry  
Regiment, 1860 model**  
Musée de l'Armée, Paris  
© Paris, musée de l'Armée, Dist RMN-GP /  
Pascal Segrette

## THE EXHIBITION JOURNEY

The 1870–1871 war was the founding event that set the tone for Franco-German relations and paved the way for Europe's future path. It effectively put an end to the diplomacy-centred balance of power known as the Concert of Europe, as well as the 'repose of Europe', ideas that did not resurface, in a different form, until the post-1945 period.

The conflict pitted France, a country that had spent several centuries building and consolidating its unity across a succession of political regimes, against Germany, a nation as yet unformed, comprising a collection of more recently emerged states.

In France, despite the proclamation of the Republic, pre-existing social tensions and the patriotic fervour triggered by Napoleon's defeat led to the Paris Commune and the outbreak of

civil war. In Germany, victory served to unify the country, symbolised by the proclamation of the Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. A huge diversity and multiplicity of memories of the war exist on both sides, French and German, from official and personal sources. These recollections give us invaluable insights into the conflict's lasting impact on European societies.

The chronology of these events should be placed within a long-term context that reveals their true span and origins, reaching back to 1864, a year that marked the start of the German unification wars, and 1875, which saw the 'War in Sight' (*Krieg in Sicht*) crisis; their span stretches from the Wars of Liberation (1813–1815) and Congress of Vienna (1815) to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which brought World War I to a close.



◀ Emil Hünten  
**The Battle of  
 Königgrätz**  
**[Die Schlacht  
 bei Königgrätz],**  
 circa 1885 (detail)  
 German Historical  
 Museum  
 Foundation, Berlin  
 © Deutsches  
 Historisches Museum,  
 Berlin/ S. Ahlers

## FRANCE AND THE GERMAN STATES: THE PATH FROM THE PEACE TO WAR

The Prussian Empire, vying with the Austrian Empire for supremacy over Germany, was becoming steadily more powerful, a rise that seemed unstoppable once Otto von Bismarck took office in 1862. German unification, with Prussia at its heart, began with the war against Denmark, known as the War of the Duchies (1864–1865), and continued with the 1866 Austro-Prussian War (*Deutscher Krieg* – German War). Prussia emerged as the victor of the 1866 conflict, thus compromising an Austro-centric German unification (*großdeutsche Lösung* – greater German solution) and leading to the creation of the North German Confederation (*kleindeutsche Lösung* – little German solution) in 1867.

In France, the Second Empire was facing particularly forceful opposition, both political and social, even with the introduction of a series of reforms designed to liberalise the regime, and efforts to bring about military reforms failed. An ambitious but ambiguous foreign policy cost a great many lives in Crimea and Italy, proved risky in Mexico, and combined with several diplomatic setbacks in the power struggle with Prussia served to further isolate and weaken the Empire. Despite the unfavourable situation, the ailing Napoleon III listened to the assurances of his General Staff and yielded to warmongering elements, declaring war on Prussia on 19 July 1870.



▲ **Young Volunteer Insignia from 1870–1871**

Musée de l'Armée, Paris

© Paris, musée de l'Armée, Dist. RMN-GP / Emilie Cambier

► **Anton Von Wrener**

*The Late Count von Moltke in His Study at Versailles*

[*Graf Moltke in seinem Arbeitszimmer in Versailles*], 1872

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Beer Carl Heine bequest, 1882

© BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Elke Walford



## THE TWO PHASES OF THE WAR

The first month of the conflict was marked by a number of episodes that conditioned the memories of the warring parties: the Reichshoffen charge, the high casualty rate of the battle of Gravelotte, the battle of Sedan, a disaster or triumph depending on the point of view. Both sides were surprised: the Germans by the rapidity of their victories and the collapse of the imperial army, the French by the speed of the German invasion and the relentless series of defeats.

Napoleon III's surrender resulted in the fall of the Second Empire and the forming of the Government of National Defence (4 September 1870), which decided to pursue the war. The Prussian General Staff then proceeded to lay siege to Paris and bombarded the city to force the government to surrender and end the war.

In a quest to liberate Paris, the Republic mobilised additional forces from the rest of the country, calling on battalions from the Mobile National Guard, volunteers and *francs-tireurs*. Nevertheless, despite a powerful surge of patriotism, the lack of officers, equipment and adequate military training meant that the National Defence armies failed to turn the tide of the war.



▲ Alphonse de Neuville

*The Last Cartridges or Defending a House Surrounded by the Enemy, 1873*

The House of the Last Cartridge, Bazeilles

© RMN-GP / Hervé Lewandowski

## THE WAR IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The 1870–1871 war is usually seen as a 19th-century conflict, symbolised by the ‘pointless’ charges of the Cuirassiers in their gleaming uniforms. The reality was in fact far bleaker, and far more modern. The war was waged very differently by the Germans, who were attacked but did not fight on their own territory, and the French, whose civilian population was directly affected by the fighting. Each army condemned the other for its brutality, embodied for the Germans by the *francs-tireurs* and ‘turcos’ – the nickname given to the Algerian skirmishers – and for the French by the uhlans (unit of German lancers) and plunderers.

Phenomena and sights associated in collective memory with the conflicts that marked the 20th century emerged during this war. Strasbourg, Belfort and Paris came under bombardment and

were partially destroyed as civilians hid in their cellars. The atrocities perpetrated against civilian populations were publicised by the press and influenced public opinion in other countries. The number of French prisoners was far higher than the Prussian General Staff’s predictions in terms of the human and material resources needed to deal with them. In addition, France suffered the invasion of a third of its territory during the war, remaining partially occupied until it paid the war indemnity in full, in September 1873.





► *Rise up All Good Citizens!*, 1871  
Musée de l'Armée, Paris  
© Paris, musée de l'Armée,  
Dist RMN-GP /  
Pascal Segrette

## THE ARMISTICE AND THE COMMUNE

By late January 1871, France was no longer capable of waging war. On 26 January, the armistice was signed and immediately applied. It demanded that elections be held so that a legitimate government could be formed and serve as an official negotiating partner to Germany. The negotiations produced the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May 1871: Germany annexed part of Alsace and Lorraine, and imposed a war indemnity of 5 billion gold francs as well as a victory parade by Prussian troops in Paris.

However, on 22 January, the Parisians, furious in the wake of the siege and feeling betrayed by the government, refused to accept defeat and demanded the election of a Commune. The city had not actually been captured by German troops, and its residents roundly condemned those they saw as capitulators. The 18 March insurrection

triggered municipal elections and the proclamation of the Paris Commune. Similar uprisings also occurred in Lyon, Marseille and Toulouse.

Exasperation mounted on both sides: the federated forces' anger at the 'capitulators' equalled the Versailles-based government's fury with the rebels. A civil war to destroy the Commune broke out: from 3 April to 28 May 1871, the second siege of Paris was made possible by Bismarck's attitude; without offering any military intervention, he nevertheless made the French army's task easier. The conflict pitted two armies of tens of thousands of combatants against each other. The Commune collapsed after two months of fighting and the rebels were subjected to brutal repression by the government: the Bloody Week was followed by executions and harsh sentences.



▲ **Paul Hadol, also known as White**

Map of Europe in 1870, **after a French Woodcut**

[Karte von Europa im Jahre 1870, **nach einem französischen Holzschnitte**], 1870

German Historical Museum Foundation, Berlin

© Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin/ I. Desnica

## AFTER THE WAR

The war marked the dawn of a new era in the political, diplomatic and military spheres. 1871 saw new regimes in place in France and Germany, while the withdrawal of French troops from Rome paved the way for the final phase of Italian unification.

France quickly got back on its feet, despite the losses of territory and payment of the war indemnity, and forged ahead with its new ambitions by developing its colonial empire. Aware of having been militarily outclassed, the country reformed its military policy, completely overhauled the army, in terms of both organisation and equipment, and cultivated the spirit of revenge in the hope of retrieving Alsace and Lorraine. The unification of Germany and dividends of victory served to boost its economy, already growing rapidly, and the country became a

success story. As antimilitarist sentiment surfaced in certain circles in France, Germany saw the emergence of a mostly middle-class fascination for the military institution.

The subtle and complex manoeuvrings of European diplomacy had confined the 1870–1871 war to France and the German states. However, in 1875 a short-lived diplomatic crisis, dubbed ‘War in Sight’, revealed a new politico-strategic configuration, with both Great Britain and Russia ready to support France in a bid to contain Germany whose excessive power they saw as a threat. Bismarck then felt that Germany should adopt a pacifying policy in Europe.



► Antonin Mercié

*Gloria Victis*, circa 1872

Orsay Museum, Paris, RF 1835

Donation Ernest May, 1924, assigned

to the Orsay Museum, 1986

© RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) /

Hervé Lewandowski

## MEMORIES OF THE WAR AND THE COMMUNE

The war and its political and diplomatic consequences left a lasting mark on European artistic output and cultural life. In France and Germany, remembrance of the war was very soon incorporated into architecture and town planning:

war-related monuments, memorials and place names were widespread throughout the two countries. At the same time, groups of former combatants were springing up everywhere, working alongside local authorities and the Church to organise commemorations and ensure their success.

In France, in spite of defeat and invasion, remembrance of the war contributed to the republican reconstruction of national history. It was brought to life in spectacular forms, with painted panoramas, figurative art and monumental sculptures that emphasised the courage of the vanquished. Remembrance of the Commune, spurred on by

censorship and paradoxically strengthened by the opposition it encountered, took shape in forms that were more modest but that helped it to be transmitted, such as books, songs, engravings and photographs. This form of remembrance carried on developing after the amnesty. The damage and destruction wrought by the war and the Commune was the topic of lively debate: should the ruins of the '*annus horribilis*' be preserved or eradicated? Should damaged buildings be restored or new ones built in their place?

In Germany, post-victory elation was expressed through historically-themed paintings, statues, monuments dedicated to the Emperor, Bismarck and Moltke, and painted panoramas depicting battles. Historians and journalists also busied themselves retracing the history of the unification wars, soon presented as a founding 'triptych'.



# CHRONOLOGY

## **6 August 1806**

Disappearance of the Holy Roman Empire under the pressure of Napoleon I

## **14 October 1806**

Decisive victory by Napoleon I at Jena over the Prussian army

## **16–19 October 1813**

Russians, Prussians, Austrians, Swedes and Saxons defeat Napoleon I at the battle of Leipzig

## **9 June 1815**

End of the Congress of Vienna

## **1840**

Diplomatic 'Rhine crisis' between France and the German Confederation

## **1848 revolutions**

- February Revolution (22–25 February) in France: fall of the July Monarchy, proclamation of the Second Republic
- March Revolution (6 March 1848–3 April 1849) in Germany: failed attempt to create a German constitutional monarchy

## **1864–1865**

War waged by Austria allied with Prussia against Denmark, known as the Second War of the Duchies

## **Summer 1866**

War between Prussia and Austria

## **4 July 1866**

Prussian victory at Königgrätz

## **14 July 1870**

Ems dispatch episode, Bismarck manoeuvres France into declaring war

## **19 July 1870**

France declares war on Prussia, which is supported by the southern German states

## **6 August 1870**

The Germans win the battles of Froeschwiller-Woerth and Forbach-Spicheren and invade Alsace

## **16–18 August 1870**

Battles of Rezonville-Mars-la-Tour then Gravelotte-Saint-Privat, the Germans encircle the French army in Metz and open up the road to Paris

## **1 September 1870**

Decisive German victory at Sedan

## **2 September 1870**

Napoleon III surrenders and is taken prisoner

## **4 September 1870**

In Paris, the Second Empire collapses, the temporary Government of National Defence is formed

## **20 September 1870**

Start of the siege of Paris

## **27 September 1870**

Strasbourg, besieged since 16 August, surrenders

## **28 October 1870**

Capitulation of Bazaine in Metz

## **11–19 January 1871**

Decisive German victories at Le Mans, Héricourt, Saint-Quentin and Buzenval

## **18 January 1871**

Proclamation of the German Empire at Versailles

## **26 January 1871**

Signature of the armistice between France and Prussia

## **15 February 1871**

Prolongation of the armistice agreement of 26 January

## **28 February 1871**

Signature of preliminary peace settlements between France and Germany

## **18 March 1871**

In Paris, popular uprising against the army, start of the civil war

## **28 March 1871**

Proclamation of the Paris Commune

## **10 May 1871**

Signature of the Treaty of Frankfurt, end of the Franco-German war

## **21 May 1871**

The French army enters Paris, start of the Bloody Week

## **28 May 1871**

The French army recaptures all of Paris, end of the Paris Commune

## **13 September 1873**

Evacuation of Verdun by the Germans, total liberation of French territory

## **April 1875**

'War in Sight' diplomatic crisis between France and Germany

## **3 August 1914**

Germany declares war on France

## **9 November 1918**

In Berlin, simultaneous proclamation of the German Republic and the Free Socialist Republic of Germany

## **11 November 1918**

Signature of the armistice between the Allies and Germany

## **4–13 January 1919**

Spartacist uprising in Berlin

## **28 June 1919**

Signature of the Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and Germany

## **30 June 1930**

Total evacuation of German territory by the French

# EXHIBITION

## CURATORS

**Mathilde Benoistel**, assistant curator  
in the Musée de l'Armée's experts  
and inventory department

**Sylvie Le Ray-Burimi**, head curator,  
in charge of the Musée de l'Armée's painting  
and sculpture department, as well as of the  
drawings, engravings and photographs room,  
and the library

**Christophe Pommier**, assistant curator  
in the Musée de l'Armée's artillery  
department

## EXHIBITION

**Marc Vallet**, layout design

**Yan Stive**, graphic design

**Etna lumière**, lighting

## PUBLICATION

The exhibition catalogue is available  
at the museum's book-shop

Published by Editions Gallimard

**Exhibition booklets and game-booklets  
(from 9 upwards) are available online**

**Prices, opening hours,  
information and bookings**  
**[musee-armee.fr](http://musee-armee.fr)**



**#franceallemagnes**

# AROUND THE EXHIBITION...

## GUIDED TOURS

Families, school groups, and students

**[jeunes@musee-armee.fr](mailto:jeunes@musee-armee.fr)**

Adults : **[benedicte@cultural.fr](mailto:benedicte@cultural.fr)**

## ENTERTAINING GUIDED TOURS

Children from 9 upwards, and parents

**Price** : €7 per child and €12 per adult

**[jeunes@musee-armee.fr](mailto:jeunes@musee-armee.fr)**

## CONCERTS

A cycle of 11 concerts echoes to the exhibition.  
Brahms, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, or Wagner among  
others.

**From 21 April to 16 June**

## LECTURES

**1870-1871 : war, arts, history**

The Musée de l'Armée is holding a cycle of  
lectures in partnership with the Permanent  
University of the City of Paris, which will  
successively tackle cultural, military and  
art history.

**From 20 April to 9 May**

## SCREENINGS

**1870-1871: Quiet please...Filming in progress!**

The exhibition also features a film cycle: five  
fiction films and fictionalised documentaries  
explore how the Franco-German war and  
Paris Commune have been represented and  
transformed into a narrative, subjects that have  
inspired numerous directors both in France  
and elsewhere. The sessions will be run by film  
historian Patrick Brion.

**From 15 to 19 May**

**Detailed programmes and bookings**  
**[musee-armee.fr](http://musee-armee.fr)**



**Le Monde**

**Historia**

**LE FIGARO  
magazine**