

MARLBOROUGH

HIS LIFE AND TIMES

BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
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BOOK ONE

CONSISTING OF VOLUMES I AND II
OF THE ORIGINAL WORK

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Chapter Five

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WAR

1701-1712

ALTHOUGH Eugene's brilliant campaign in Italy had opened the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701, no shot had been fired in the northern theatre. In Flanders, upon the Rhine, and upon the Moselle armies had assembled, and each of the great combatants was busy securing smaller allies. Louis XIV had, as we have seen, acquired partial control of the Archbishopric of Cologne and the Bishopric of Liège at the same time as he had occupied the Belgian fortresses.¹ The first overt act of the Germanic states was the coercion of the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. This prince was a mere figurehead whose younger brother had collected in his name, but with French gold, an army of twelve thousand mercenaries, and was forming a league of French supporters in North Germany. The Elector of Hanover at length intervened. During the night of March 20 the younger brother was driven out by Hanoverian troops, and the mercenaries agreed to serve henceforth under the Emperor. This was the first war news which reached Queen Anne after her accession.

Marlborough had arranged that on May 4/15 war should be simultaneously declared upon France by England, the States-General, and the Empire. This event finally reassured the Dutch, who hitherto, despite Marlborough's firm assertions, had feared that their island ally intended only to act as an accessory—*i.e.*, to pick up what was good for herself at the expense of friend and foe. The causes of England's quarrel were set forth in a proclamation which is a model of forceful historical compression. Its conclusion should be noted.

We henceforth strictly forbid the holding of any correspondence or communication with France or Spain or their subjects. But because there are remaining in our Kingdoms many of the subjects of France and Spain, We do declare our Royal intention to be, that all the subjects of France and Spain, who shall demean themselves dutifully towards us, shall be safe in their persons and estates.²

¹ Vol. I, p. 232.

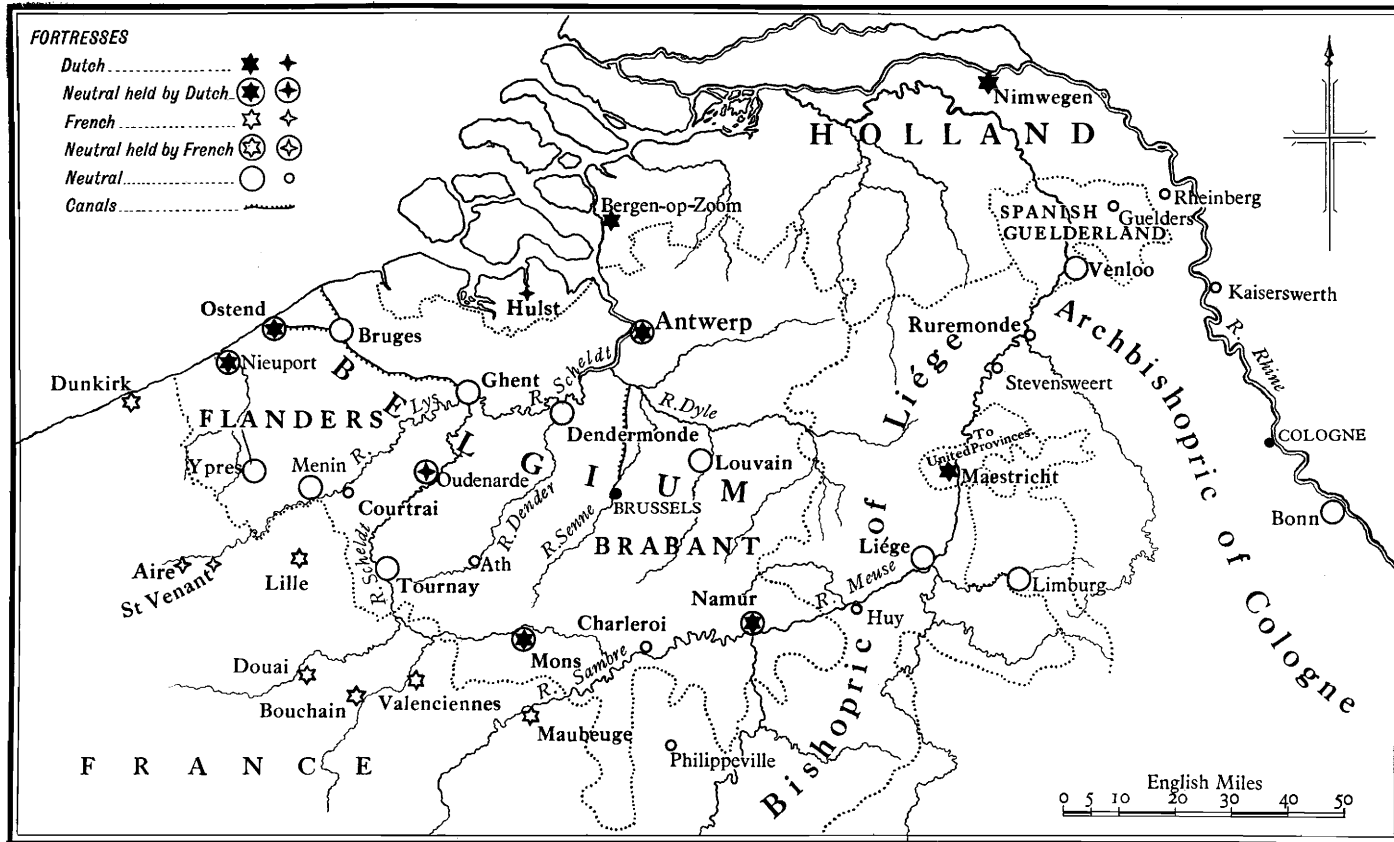
² Boyer, i, 31.

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This passage will jar the modern mind. We see how strong was the structure of Christendom in these times and with what restraints even warring nations acted. Of course, nowadays, with the many improvements that have been made in international morals and behaviour, all enemy subjects, even those whose countries were only technically involved, even those who had lived all their lives in England, and the English women who had married them, would, as in every other state based on an educated democracy, be treated within twenty-four hours as malignant foes, flung into internment camps, and their private property stolen to assist the expenses of the war. In the twentieth century mankind has shaken itself free from all those illogical, old-world prejudices, and achieved the highest efficiency of brutal, ruthless war.

We shall see that the same kind of archaic conduct ruled in the field. After the fury of battle was spent both sides, and especially the victors, laboured to rescue the wounded, instead of leaving them to perish inch by inch in agony in No Man's Land. If in their poverty they stripped the dead of their clothing, they also exchanged prisoners with meticulous accounting. The opposing generals paid each other every compliment and courtesy which did not hamper their operations, and in the winter season issued passports to prominent officers to traverse hostile territory on their shortest routes home. Although the great causes in dispute were stated with a robust vigour and precision which we have now lost, no hatred, apart from military antagonism, was countenanced among the troops. All was governed by strict rules of war, into which bad temper was not often permitted to enter. The main acceptances of a polite civilization still reigned across the lines of opposing armies, and mob violence and mechanical propaganda had not yet been admitted to the adjustment of international disputes.

Since from this time forward military affairs must play a main part in our story, the reader should survey the whole scope of the war, and consider the governing conditions under which it was fought. As in the recent world war, two great European countries, one much weaker than the other, found themselves lapped about and almost encircled by a numerous alliance of which England was the mainspring, and by the sea, of which she was already the mistress. The kingdoms of France and Spain were in a central position in 1702 similar to that of Germany and Austria in 1914. They had the advantage of interior lines and could strike outward in various directions. They could throw their weight now against this oppo-

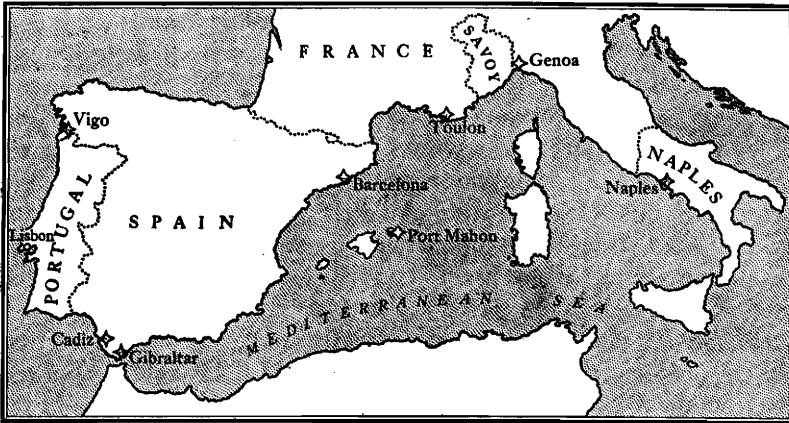


THE BARRIER FORTRESSES AFTER THE TREATY OF RYSWICK



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ment, now against that. All their fortunes depended upon an army, incomparable in power, numbers, organization, and repute, and upon the authority of its War Lord. Spain throughout followed the guidance of Louis XIV in the same subordination that in our days Austria observed to Germany. Louis XIV, like the Kaiser William II and his general staff, at the beginning could choose for each campaign where the decisive theatre should lie. He could perfect his plans in secrecy, and execute them without any domestic hindrance.



MEDITERRANEAN NAVAL BASES

The allies, so loosely and precariously joined together, among whom communication was slow and slender, were liable to be struck down one after the other.

The command of the sea rested throughout in the hands of England and Holland. Queen Anne had above two hundred ships of war—half of them of over fifty guns and “fit to lie in the line”—manned by forty or fifty thousand sailors and marines. To these the Dutch joined three ships to every English five. The French were scarcely half of this combined strength. They never attempted seriously to dispute the Narrow Seas or the Channel. Their frigates and privateers maintained themselves upon the oceans; but for the rest their aim was to preserve the control of the Mediterranean. Until the allies could alter this King Louis was only partially enveloped, and still had the advantage of striking where he chose. On the other hand, the fact of having to defend simultaneously so many ports and potential landing-places from amphibious attack was a serious drain on French man-power.

A prevailing purpose of Marlborough's strategy was to secure the command of the Mediterranean. But this did not depend upon ships alone. Cadiz, Gibraltar, Barcelona, Toulon, Genoa, Naples, and Port Mahon, all the great fortified harbours of the inland sea and its approaches, were held by the Two Crowns, and Lisbon was neutral. The battleships of those days, dependent only upon the winds for movement, could keep the sea for five or six months, or more; but the dangers of crossing the Bay of Biscay and entering the mouth of the English Channel amid the winter gales were fearful; and without fresh meat, green vegetables, and intervals of repose ashore the mortality among the sailors was grievous. It was little use sending the fleet to the Mediterranean only for June and July. A secure harbour and well-equipped dockyard, where the ships could be careened, repaired, and replenished, and where the crews could be eased and refreshed, were indispensable. The search for this dockyard dominated the policy of the Cabinet and of the Admiralty. Although temporary resting-places were found by diplomacy at Lisbon in 1703 and by the conquests of Gibraltar and Barcelona in 1704 and 1705, it was not until 1708, after the Italian theatre had ceased to count, that a secure, well-equipped base for the fleet was established at Port Mahon, in the island of Minorca. Meanwhile year by year the Cabinet forced the Admiralty and the naval commanders to run undue risks by going out early and coming home late in the season, and much suffering and loss of ships and life followed therefrom.

The employment of the Navy was as usual divided between furthering the main purposes of the war and trade protection. Naval opinion and the whole mercantile interest wished to set trade protection first; but this was not the view of the Government, nor of Parliament. Whigs and Tories alike wished the fleet to be used as part of the main war-effort. Marlborough directly, and through his brother, Admiral Churchill, at the Admiralty, pressed in this direction; and certainly in the War of the Spanish Succession the energies of the fleet were devoted to fighting purposes and the main war-plans in a far higher degree than ever before or since. Sir George Rooke, the Admiral of the Fleet, was the chief opponent of this view. He resisted at every stage and by every means the policy of trying to dominate the Mediterranean. Arrogant, crafty, obstinately entangled in his own tackle, and afflicted with persistent ill-health, he saw no prize worth the risk and trouble in securing an overseas base on the Iberian Peninsula; still less was he attracted by the prospect of such a base being used to draw the main fleet

into the Mediterranean. The Tory Admiral was a sluggish, wary man whose imagination had no room for great designs, and who was forced by circumstances and accident into the achievements which have rendered him famous. Shovell, Fairborne, Leake, Norris, and others were far more daring, vigorous admirals, and lent themselves more readily to the wishes of the Executive and the general purposes of the war.

If the allies were to rid themselves of the peril of being attacked in detail they must wrest the initiative from Louis XIV, and by dominant action at one point or another rivet the attention of the central mass. The paths by which France could be invaded were not so numerous as might appear. Roads were few and bad, and in the absence of railways all the natural obstacles of forests, mountains, and barren regions asserted their full power. Armies of from sixty to a hundred thousand men could only live by moving constantly through fertile lands or where their supplies could be brought them by fresh or salt water. The great rivers were the railways of this war. The control of the long, uninterrupted course of rivers and canals enabled armies to operate in their full power, drawing their food and ammunition easily to them week by week and moving their siege trains. But for this very reason every river and canal, especially the confluences and junctions, was barred by strong, elaborate fortresses, each of which had to be separately captured. The value of every fortress and the cost of taking it in time, life, and money were measured with high exactness on both sides; two months for this, a month for that; a fortnight for a small place, and three or four days for a mere castle. Thus the rivers represented the lines of railways, and the stations on them were forts barring all traffic to those who held them not.

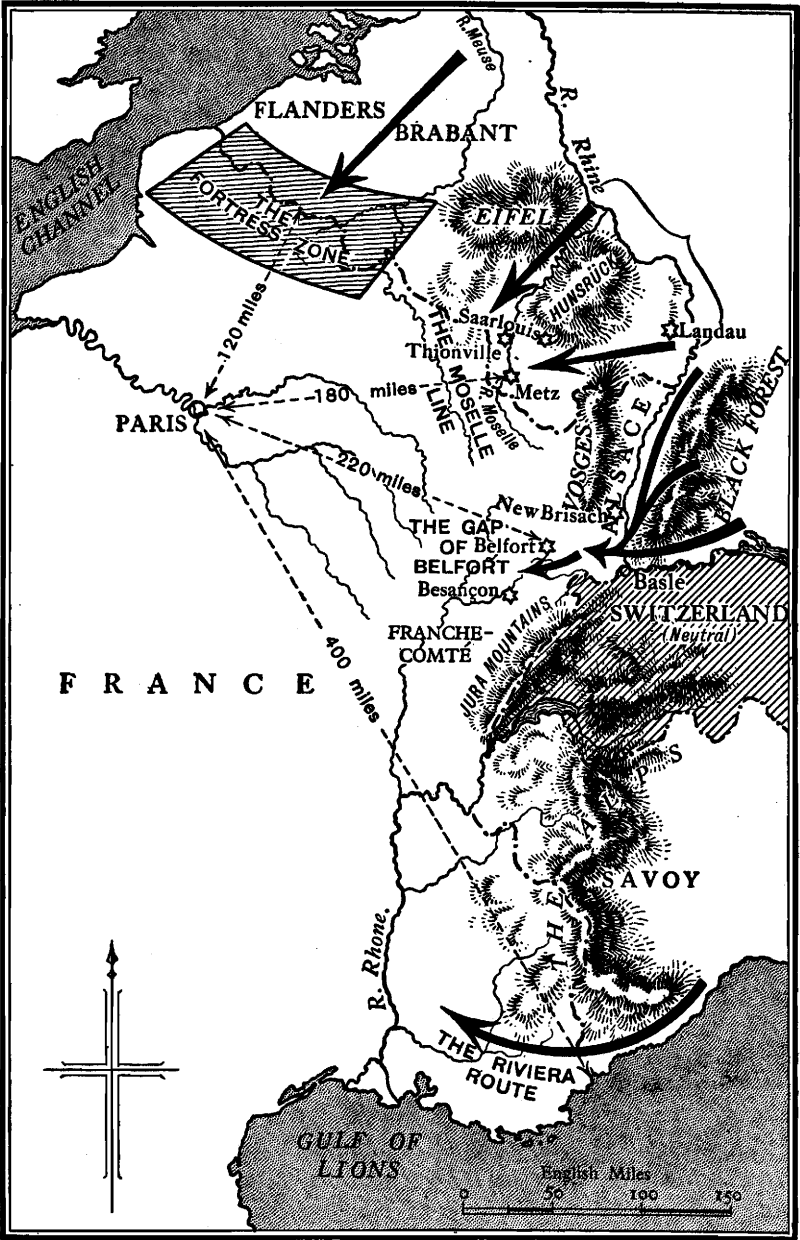
The shipping resources of the two Maritime Powers, relatively large though they were, their harbours, quays, and port accommodation, were never sufficient to make the invasion of France possible by any sea-borne army likely to overcome so mighty and war-like a state. Raids and diversions of all kinds could be considered in their place, but our ancestors never believed that a grand and decisive stroke would be launched upon France from the sea.

There were, however, three or four practicable lines of invasion open to the allies. In the south there was the Riviera road. An army might work its way slowly from Italy into France along the coast, being fed and helped by its ships from port to port. This was a plan which several times attracted Prince Eugene. However, the

invader would enter France at an immense distance from Paris, and in provinces the loss of which, though fertile, would not affect the war-making strength of Louis XIV. From the Mediterranean northward for more than three hundred miles France was protected by the enormous confusion of the Alps and the robust neutrality of the Swiss. A second line of invasion was offered in the gap between the Jura Mountains in the north of Switzerland and the southern spurs of the Vosges. This road was obstructed by a French fortress system of some strength comprising New Brisach, constructed by Vauban, Belfort, Besançon, and other strong places. North of this gap again France was protected for another hundred miles by the triple obstacles of the Black Forest, itself almost a mountain-range, the Rhine, and the Vosges Mountains, one behind the other. The third route was through Northern Alsace or along the Moselle, converging on the French fortress group Saarlouis, Thionville, and Metz. This was generally believed to be the surest and most deadly, and, if Marlborough had found it possible to marshal the effective strength of Germany behind him, it was the pathway he would certainly have made his own.

Lastly there were the plains of Flanders, fertile, populous, intersected by their great and magnificent rivers and canals, offering every facility to the movements of the largest armies and enabling the two Maritime Powers to act in the closest harmony. But this area was covered by immense systems of fortification. More than thirty large fortresses of the first class, complete from outworks to citadel, and perhaps fifty fortified towns and strongholds, the work of two generations, formed artificial barriers between France and Holland. At the time when Marlborough's campaign began nearly all these fortress-towns were in the hands of France. All the fortresses of the Spanish Netherlands had, as we have seen, been seized by Louis XIV in 1701. All the fortresses on the Meuse and Rhine, with one remarkable exception, had passed to the French by the seduction of the priestly rulers of Cologne and Liège. Thus the Dutch began the war deprived of virtually the whole of their barrier and of all the strong places they had held in the time of King William. They had a few fortresses like Nimwegen and Bergen-op-Zoom in their own land, but for the rest they must rely solely upon the manhood of their armies.

The exception was Maestricht. This very large fortress on the Meuse lay in an enclave of Dutch territory. It had not been affected either by the transfer of the Spanish Netherlands or by that of the



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Bishoprics of Cologne and Liége. It was a fortress of the first order, of historic fame and modernized defences. Within its earthworks the Dutch had gathered immense supplies, very considerable stores, and a trustworthy garrison of no less than fourteen thousand men.

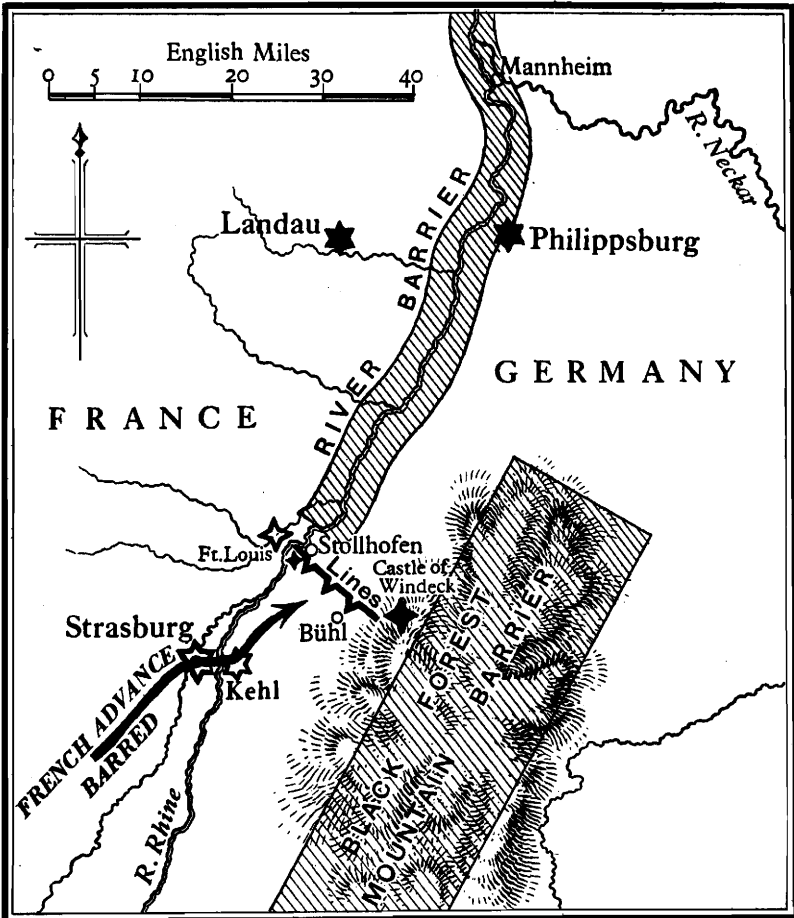
The French, on the other hand, had as their second line the great fortresses within the French frontier, and thus enjoyed both their own defences and those which should properly have belonged to their opponents. Thus at the outset of the new war the French had the control of the Scheldt and all its tributaries, of the Meuse (excepting Maestricht), and of long stretches of the Rhine and the Upper Rhine. Finally, Louis had constructed in 1701 a continuous line of fortifications along a seventy-miles crescent from Antwerp to Namur. These "Lines of Brabant" had been sited under Vauban's supervision by the best French engineers; and entrenchments, palisades, and inundations, all vigilantly watched, offered an unbroken defensive position, on any sector of which the French field army could confront an assailant from the north.

During 1701 the attitude of the Germanic princes was ill-defined. They were taking precautions and raising forces; but they were for the most part indisposed either to succour the Emperor, as their antiquated feudal fealty required, or to declare war upon France. In these circumstances the Margrave of Baden, whose domains around Rastadt, between the Upper Rhine and the Neckar, were very near the conflagration, was a personage of high importance. At the head of the Imperial armies he had gained several notable victories over the Turks in bygone years. He was reputed an accomplished soldier, and was certainly a man of proved physical courage. As a ruling prince he was prepared to lead troops of his own against the French. It was natural, therefore, that he should receive the command of whatever Imperial armies should be assembled to defend Germany. He thus appears at the outset of the war as the first general of the Empire.

During the autumn and winter of 1701 the Margrave busied himself with the defence of the Black Forest and the valley of the Upper Rhine. He aroused considerable enthusiasm among the German populations threatened by French invasion, especially in the circles of Swabia and Franconia. He organized local militias, supported by the inhabitants of the towns and villages, to aid the regular troops which were gradually coming into the field. For further protection he constructed a number of fortified lines barring

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the least difficult tracks through the Black Forest. But the most important strategic task which he accomplished was the creation of the celebrated Lines of Stollhofen. These fortifications ran from the river to the wooded mountains, and barred a French advance from



THE LINES OF STOLLHOFEN

the Strassburg bridgeheads down the Rhine valley on the right bank of the river. They covered a front of about nine miles from a strong star-fort opposite Fort Louis, through Stollhofen and Bühl to the castle of Windeck on the wooded heights. These lines were of great strength, and took full advantage of the marshes and other obstacles. In places they were continuous, and protected by deep, broad ditches

filled with water. The system seems to have been extremely well conceived for its purpose. During the whole of the war the French never felt themselves strong enough to attempt the crossing of the Rhine below the Lines of Stollhofen. The project was frequently discussed; but the risks which an invading army would run during, and still more after, the passage of the broad, rapid river, proved in practice a complete deterrent. So also were the mountains and forests on which the left of the lines rested. A frontal attack upon the fortifications, if they were adequately garrisoned, seemed a hazardous and certainly a very costly major operation. It was not until 1707 that Marshal Villars captured them by a brilliant and almost bloodless surprise. Thus the Lines of Stollhofen played a most serviceable part throughout the early critical years of the war, and their construction must be regarded as a military measure of rare discrimination and of the highest value.

In nearly every great war there is some new mechanical feature introduced the early understanding of which confers important advantages. Military opinion is naturally rigid. Men held in the grip of discipline, moving perilously from fact to fact and staking their lives at every step, are nearly always opposed to new ideas. For more than forty years the flintlock had been in actual use in Europe. Its superiority over the matchlock, with its fuse and delayed, uncertain discharge, was only very gradually recognized. As early as 1660 the English Guards had the flintlock. The Dutch haltingly followed this example. The French were the most conservative of all. During the campaigns of King William the flintlock was gaining acceptance and displacing the matchlock in all the armies, but last of all in the French. Nevertheless the difference between the two patterns of musket, though, as we might think, slight and feeble, carried with it for those who had the seeing eye a decisive change in infantry tactics and in the rôle of infantry upon the battlefield. This change was facilitated by the invention of a ring-bayonet which was fastened around the muzzle of the musket instead of blocking it by being screwed inside it. The infantry soldier by this device—which he owed to General Mackay's reflections upon Killicrankie—became at once pikeman and musketeer. At the same time the improved fire of the flintlock made the function of musketeer increasingly important. Infantry armed with the flintlock and the ring-bayonet could develop a volley-fire of a destructiveness both to horse and foot hitherto unknown. During

King William's wars these conditions already existed, but they were not consciously applied by any of the combatants.

Marlborough used this new fact. When he became Commander-in-Chief his root conception of infantry was not a thing that stood, but a thing that fired. The flintlock was by now universally adopted in the armies of the Sea Powers, and to a very large extent in Germany and the Empire. All Marlborough's training of infantry was directed to developing fire. He used frequently to parade large bodies of infantry and practise them in firing. Whereas a French company fired rank by rank, Marlborough's troops fired platoon by platoon, thus assuring the control of the officer commanding the platoon over the volley and the reloading. Fire discipline was already one of the established bases of his thought. All his handling of infantry was governed by the desire to develop precise, regular volley-firing by platoons, and to deploy lines of infantry each company unit of which should be capable of self-sustained, steady fire. Such units while they kept their ranks could not only hold their own against cavalry, but inflict great damage upon them if they came too close. Moreover, brought front to front within sixty or seventy yards of the hostile foot, they could give more hurt than they received. Infantry organized, trained, and deployed for fire could not long be brought in close contact with infantry organized for stability without experiencing a sensible advantage. After half an hour of conflict the other side would look much more ragged than they. This comprehension of the fire-power of infantry was a definite characteristic of Marlborough's tactics. He did not invent or discover it. It had grown unperceived. He saw it and applied it.

The armies of Louis XIV had for two generations held the professional primacy of Europe, but perhaps for that very reason they had been less capable of progress. Turenne long before had sought to develop infantry fire. In spite of the inferior firearms of his day, he tried to make some use of infantry in action other than merely to stand in solid blocks in particular positions. He even experimented with individual skirmishers, and certainly he wished to claim for infantry a higher position upon the battlefields of the seventeenth century. But Turenne's training only covered the troops under his immediate eye, and in the rest of the French Army in the third quarter of the seventeenth century every regiment did what its colonel thought best. Louvois as War Minister imposed uniformity from on high; the whole Army should practise the same drill. He enforced this with the authority of the barrack-square. Fortunately

from our point of view, the valuable element of uniformity was not combined with the true choice.

Thus when the world war began again French commanders had a distinctly lower view of the capacities of infantry than Marlborough or those who served under him. They adopted the flintlock tardily. Even as late as the beginning of William's campaigns the French orders were to break up flintlocks captured in the field. Not until 1700 was the flintlock definitely authorized in France, and its adoption was not complete for some years. It follows from this that the French infantry formations remained five or six ranks deep, while Marlborough favoured a depth of three or four. Their tactical regulations for 1703 still spoke of "le combat à la pique et au mousquet." This phrase reveals how imperfectly the significance of the flintlock, the ring bayonet, and fire tactics were realized in the French Army. They learned in a hard school, but they learned slowly. Once the armies were brought in contact the English and Dutch infantry felt themselves superior to the French, and this accounted for their trust in themselves and for Marlborough's trust in them.

Moreover, the French conceptions arising from these slightly distorted data rated the infantry too low and did not assign them their full scope in the battle. Louis XIV taught his Marshals that infantry attacks were useless and that cavalry was the decisive arm; whereas we always see Marlborough's infantry used with the cavalry and made to play their part with mobile cannon at every stage in the general attack.

Neither in the use of cavalry did the armies of Louis XIV excel. They placed an undue emphasis upon the long horse-pistol, and trained their squadrons to deliver from the halt volleys rank after rank at opposing cavalry, using the sword rather when they came to the *mêlée*. Certainly one may say that pistol and sword counted equally with the French cavalry. Very different were Marlborough's regulations. With the infantry he relied more on fire and less on steel than the French. With the cavalry he relied entirely upon steel. He did not, indeed, discard the pistol utterly, but he only allowed his cavalry *three pistol-rounds per man for the whole campaign*, the idea being that the pistol was the weapon for individual emergency or foraging duty. The sword and the shock of a mass of horsemen were the factors on which Marlborough counted. His cavalry were trained to *manœuvre*, to approach the enemy slowly and in close order, and then to ride upon them at a heavy trot in the teeth of their pistol-

fire. This was justified by the fact that, although the musketry-fire of well-trained infantry could break cavalry, the pistol-fire of horse-men was no defence against a resolute charge.

It would be a mistake to assign decisive qualities to the differences in the tactics of the opposing armies which have been set forth here. There was no contrast of black and white, but only of various shades of grey. The hostile troops were often so closely engaged and the war went on so long that the armies learned from one another continually. Yet one can see a certain superiority of method from the very beginning of the new war, which asserted itself on several great occasions and no doubt at many other times which were not noticed.

Nevertheless these were still the great days of cavalry, and from a quarter to a third of the men in each army were horse soldiers. A wide expanse of flat or gently undulating country was required for a trial of strength. Marlborough's battles were all fought on fronts of four or five miles, whereas Waterloo filled but three. To find again such large fields we have to come down to the nineteenth century, with its Gettysburg and Gravelotte. The armies of Marlborough's time could usually refuse battle by retiring within "inclosures" or by remaining in rough, scrubby, broken ground. A smooth plain was also necessary for the infantry. It is difficult for a modern officer, with his ideas of individual foot soldiers working and scrambling separately or in small groups across or through any kind of country, and feeling the safer the more it is accidented, to realize what tiny obstacles were serious to the infantry of this period. Most of these historic features would hardly be noticed by a tourist in his walk. But the infantry of Marlborough and Louis XIV depended for their existence in battle upon keeping close and perfect order. Although their fire-power was growing, they must still depend largely upon their strict array and their bayonets, while all around, close at hand, often within hailing distance, moved the flashing squadrons which upon the slightest disorder could crumple them almost instantaneously into bloody and fatal confusion. Thus passing even a small hedge or ditch, which unarmed men could easily jump or perhaps step over, was in the presence of the enemy a most anxious business, and every movement, even of a hundred yards, had to be judiciously foreseen as to the ground and timed as to the enemy.

It would, however, be a mistake to infer that battles under these conditions were slow conflicts of feeble forces. On the contrary,

they were far more sudden and intense than those of the Great War. Instead of struggles lasting for several weeks along fronts of seventy or eighty miles, all was brought into a small compass and a single day. Sometimes two hundred thousand men fought for an afternoon in a space no larger than the London parks put together, and left the ground literally carpeted with a quarter of their number, and in places heaped with maimed or slaughtered men. The destiny of nations flowed with the blood from their brief collision. The spectacle of one of the battlefields of Marlborough, Frederick, or Napoleon was for these reasons incomparably more gruesome than any equal sector of the recent fronts in France or Flanders.

We do not think that the warriors of our own time, unsurpassed in contempt of death or endurance of strain, would have regarded these old battles as a light ordeal. Instead of creeping forward from one crater to another or crouching low in their trenches under the blind hail of death and amid its shocking explosions, Marlborough's men and their brave, well-trained opponents marched up to each other shoulder to shoulder, three, four, or six ranks deep, and then slowly and mechanically fired volley after volley into each other at duelling distance until the weaker wavered and broke. This was the moment when the falcon cavalry darted in and hacked and slashed the flying men without mercy. Keeping an exact, rigid formation under the utmost trial, filling promptly all the gaps which at every discharge opened in the ranks, repeating at command, platoon by platoon, or rank by rank, the numerous unhurried motions of loading and firing—these were the tests to which our forebears were not unequal. In prolonged severe fighting the survivors of a regiment often stood for hours knee-deep amid the bodies of comrades writhing or for ever still. In their ears rang the hideous chorus of the screams and groans of a pain which no anæsthetic would ever soothe.

Here we must make a digression which may illuminate for the lay reader not one but many operations of war. Accounts of battles and campaigns almost invariably describe the *qualitative* character of the manœuvres without reference to their *quantitative* side. For instance, we read that this battle was won by turning the enemy's flank, and that by breaking his centre; that this army retreated because its line of supply was threatened; or that that advanced boldly, although its communications were cut, and in turn assailed those of its opponent. Where, then, is the secret of victory? It looks at first sight so simple

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to say "turn the flank," "pierce the centre," or "cut the communications." But apparently none of these processes work by themselves. All are liable to be countered by other equally obvious and desirable movements. Thus the text-books on war too often merely show certain relations of the fronts and flanks of armies which have been as often favourable to one side as to the other. In truth, all these relations, though suggestive to a student, are meaningless apart from their *quantitative* data. Circumstances alone decide whether a correct conventional manœuvre is right or wrong. The circumstances include all the factors which are at work at the time; the numbers and quality of the troops and their morale, their weapons, their confidence in their leaders, the character of the country, the condition of the roads, time, and the weather: and behind these the politics of their states, the special interests which each army has to guard, together with many other complications. And it is the true comprehension at any given moment of the dynamic sum of all these constantly shifting forces that constitutes military genius.

The problem can seldom be calculated on paper alone, and never copied from examples of the past. Its highest solution must be evolved from the eye and brain and soul of a single man, which from hour to hour are making subconsciously all the unweighable adjustments, no doubt with many errors, but with an ultimate practical accuracy. Thus while nothing is more easy than to assign reasons for success or failure by describing the movements, it is between more or less equal opponents impossible to reveal the real secret of either. That is why the campaigns of the greatest commanders often seem so simple that one wonders why the other fellow did not do as well. That is why critics can write so cogently, and yet successful performers are so rare. Almost any intelligent scribe can draw up a lucid and logical treatise full of laboriously ascertained facts and technical phrases on a particular war situation. But the great captains of history, as has been said, seem to move their armies about "as easily as they ride their horses from place to place." Nothing but genius, the dæmon in man, can answer the riddles of war, and genius, though it may be armed, cannot be acquired, either by reading or experience. In default of genius nations have to make war as best they can, and since that quality is much rarer than the largest and purest diamonds, most wars are mainly tales of muddle. But when from time to time it flashes upon the scene, order and design with a sense almost of infallibility draw out from hazard and confusion. "The mere aspirant after a type of

character only shows his hopeless inferiority when the natural orator or fighter or lover comes along."¹

The task of the commander in Marlborough's wars was direct. There were no higher formations like divisions and corps. Even the brigade was an improvisation adopted for the campaign. The armies were often divided into wings. There were for each wing generals of cavalry and infantry. Each, like the Chief, was assisted by lieutenant-generals. These high executive officers were available either to carry out particular tasks assigned to them often in the heat of action, or to see that the main plan, with which they were made acquainted, was carried out. The control of the battle was maintained on each side by eight or ten superior officers who had no permanent commands of their own, and were virtually the general staff officers of modern times, working in a faithful subordination. It was with and through these that the commander-in-chief acted, and it is astonishing how smoothly and effectually the troops were often handled and great changes of plan and formation effected even in the stress of action.

In the midst of the scene of carnage, with its drifting smoke-clouds, scurrying fugitives, and brightly coloured lines, squares, and oblongs of men, he sat his horse, often in the hottest fire, holding in his mind the position and fortunes of every unit in his army from minute to minute and giving his orders aloud. We must picture him in those days when the Signal Corps was non-existent, attended not only by three or four generals of high rank, but by at least twenty young officers specially trained and specially mounted, men who were capable of following the event with intelligent eyes, who watched the field incessantly, and who knew where to find the subordinate commanders, their brigades and regiments. For short distances or less important orders the runners we see in the tapestries with their long brass-headed staves of authority were used. Thus in the space of four or five hours perhaps thirty or forty thousand men were killed or wounded on the two sides, and another fearful but glorious name was inscribed in the annals of war.

All this was quite different from the trials of our latter-day generals. We will not belittle them, but they were the trials of mind and spirit working in calm surroundings, often beyond even the sound of the cannonade. There are no physical disturbances: there is no danger: there is no hurry. The generalissimo of an army of

¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

two million men, already for ten days in desperate battle, has little or nothing to do except to keep himself fit and cool. His life is not different, except in its glory, from that of a painstaking, punctual public official, and far less agitating than that of a Cabinet Minister who must face an angry Chamber on the one hand or an offended party upon the other. There is no need for the modern commander to wear boots and breeches: he will never ride a horse except for the purposes of health. In the height of his largest battles, when twenty thousand men are falling every day, time will hang heavy on his hands. The heads of a dozen departments will from hour to hour discreetly lay significant sheets of paper on his desk. At intervals his staff will move the flags upon his map, or perhaps one evening the Chief of Staff himself will draw a blue line or a brown line or make a strong arrow upon it. His hardest trials are reduced to great simplicity. "Advance," "Hold," or "Retreat." "There are but ten divisions left in reserve: shall we give three to-day to the beseeching, clamouring battle-zone, or keep them back till to-morrow or the day after? Shall we send them in trains to the north or to the south?" His personal encounters are limited to an unpleasant conversation with an army commander who must be dismissed, an awkward explanation to a harassed Cabinet, or an interview with a representative of the neutral Press. Time is measured at least by days and often by weeks. There is nearly always leisure for a conference even in the gravest crises. It is not true that the old battle has merely been raised to a gigantic scale. In the process of enlargement the sublime function of military genius—perhaps happily—has been destroyed for ever.

But in the times of which we tell the great commander proved in the day of battle that he possessed a combination of mental, moral, and physical qualities adapted to action which were so lifted above the common run as to seem almost godlike. His appearance, his serenity, his piercing eye, his gestures, the tones of his voice—nay, the beat of his heart—diffused a harmony upon all around him. Every word he spoke was decisive. Victory often depended upon whether he rode half a mile this way or that. At any moment a cannon-shot or a cavalry inrush might lay him with thousands of his soldiers a mangled bundle on the sod. That age has vanished for ever. Other trials are reserved for the human spirit. New and vaguer problems overtop such minds as are available. But let us not pretend that modern achievements can be compared, except by million-tongued propaganda, with the personal feats which the very few great captains of the world performed.