

**This document is designed to aid those that wish to learn more about the individual characters of the Thirty Years War, and is intended above all to serve as a convenient reference. It is not a wholly flawless or peer reviewed document, so please don't try and use it in your essays or steal its conclusions for your own benefit. Please DO use this as a companion to our Thirty Years War series, and please also DO contact me if you have any questions about what you read here.**

**The following were all posts on When Diplomacy Fails' Facebook Group and Facebook Page, and can be found there still.**

*Your history friend,*

*Zack Twamley*

## Post #1: Defenestrating Prague, Again...

For our first post hyping you up for the Thirty Years War series we have planned, it's natural we start with the event that pushed the first domino over - the Defenestration of Prague.

Nearly 400 years ago, disgruntled Bohemians threw Habsburg officials out of the windows of Prague's Hradshin Castle. The discontent had bubbled over for some time, and the actions of the Bohemians were twinged with nervous, anxious excitement over the privileges and freedoms, which their new King Ferdinand II, soon to be elected Holy Roman Emperor, had been seeing to undermine.

The response set the widespread discontent within Bohemia alight, and threw up so many more questions than it answered. Were the Habsburgs weakened? How far should this revolt go? Could Ferdinand ever be trusted to respect their rights? What allies could be relied upon? How would the Habsburgs respond? Should Bohemia search for a new King?

It was this final question which truly transformed the Bohemian revolt into a civil and religious war within the Holy Roman Empire. From this point onwards, the conflict would only escalate, and from this Pandora's box the civil/religious war would be internationalised and escalated, until Germany was in ruins, and nobody could remember where it had really all begun.



## **Post #2: Ferdinand II, Holy Roman Emperor**

Ferdinand II was Holy Roman Emperor from 1619-1637 was arguably the most important figure during the period of the Thirty Years War. Understanding his motives, fears and ambitions is crucial if we are to understand why the conflict began and lasted as long as it did.

There were several layers to Ferdinand's decision making and to his policy; it cannot all be explained by his militant Catholicism, or his influence under the Jesuits, just as surely as it'd be wrong to ignore these building blocks of his character. In our series, we will get to grips with Ferdinand and assess his responsibility for the Thirty Years War. Did he had a choice in the matter if the interests of his family were to be preserved, or was he just the kind of person that Europe did not need at such a fractious time?



### **Post #3: Frederick V of the Palatinate**

If it wasn't Ferdinand II's fault, then the blame often falls onto Frederick V, the Calvinist Elector of the Palatinate. Frederick's life began and ended with competition against the Habsburgs, the family Frederick regarded as solely responsible for jeopardising the liberties of the German people and the constitution of the Empire.

Ferdinand's dogmatism and persecution of his subjects, Frederick would say, was to blame for the escalation of the conflict and the ruin of Germany.

Not so, said Ferdinand - if Frederick hadn't accepted the Crown of Bohemia from that rabble in the first place, none of this mess would ever have exploded into such a bitter, terrible war.

I had no choice, said Frederick - the Bohemians wished to be free and I wished to protect them from your absolutism.

It was none of your business said Ferdinand.

I will make it my business, said Frederick.

As you can see - different trains of thought exist as to who was to blame for the eruption of the Thirty Years War. Undoubtedly, Frederick's decision to accept the Crown of Bohemia made the conflict possible, but should we blame him for this acceptance? Did he, like Ferdinand, have no choice in the matter, or was he a pawn of his advisors and of their ambitions?



## Post #4: Maximilian Of Bavaria

Maximilian of Bavaria is arguably in the first tier of important characters of the Thirty Years War. He's certainly a man we need to understand if we are to explain why the conflict erupted and continued in the way it did.

Max was a Catholic of strong convictions. Unlike Ferdinand though, Max had the economic power and diplomatic leverage to fulfil his ambitions, both for his religion and his house. Under the pretext of aiding his Emperor Ferdinand II, Maximilian of Bavaria would be fabulously enriched, his lands would be greatly increased, and he would be transformed from a mere Duke into an Elector of the Holy Roman Empire.

Yet, this association with the Habsburgs would ultimately bring ruin upon Maximilian's lands and peoples, and would subject Bavaria to invasion by French, Swedish and countless other mercenary armies, once the successful years of the Habsburgs were replaced by desperate confusion and terror.

Maximilian remains one of the most remarkable figures of the Thirty Years War, for the simple reason that, unlike much of his contemporaries, he lived through ALL of it. As Bavaria's ruler between 1597-1651, Max was one of the few individuals to see the Thirty Years War progress, escalate and mutate into something so much worse than its original shape. By the time of his death, after much loss, triumph, and diplomatic intrigue, neither Bavaria nor Germany was ever the same again.



## Post #5: Cardinal Richelieu

There's a reason why Cardinal Richelieu has his own mug/Patreon tier - he was central to improving the diplomatic and strategic position of France, but he was also central to widening the Thirty Years War. This of course makes him VERY important to us.

Richelieu was charged with directing French policy at a difficult time in France. Still recovering from the traumas and devastation of the Wars of Religion, France could not afford to get involved in the Thirty Years War from the get-go, so it was only natural that she husbanded her resources instead, and sorted out some domestic political problems, not to mention religious ones, before intervening. No question about it - a conflict like this one, she would have to intervene.

Ever since the conflict had begun in 1618 the French had watched its course, but King Louis XIII was in a weak position, and the country was too divided to come to the rescue of the Bohemians, not that Louis wanted to anyway, since he viewed the rebels as heretical and deserving of punishment. What Richelieu did was bypass the religious scruples, and once his position was secure, he sided with powers based on their political-strategic inclinations - read, anti-Habsburg - rather than their religious persuasion.

This was remarkable for Richelieu, since he was a Cardinal after all, but even more than the Church, what Richelieu favoured was improving the position of France. This could not done so long as Spain and the Habsburgs in both branches loomed so large in Europe. When Sweden was defeated in late 1634 and the Holy Roman Emperor seemed on the verge of reigning supreme in Germany, for the sake of the balance of power Richelieu entered the conflict. It was a bumpy ride as we'll see, but the journey brought France to its eventual great power status.



## Post #6: Gustavus Adolphus

Who else other than Gustavus Adolphus could have so altered the course of history?

In 1630, the Habsburg family was triumphant, having achieved all of its goals in the Empire, and trounced the Danes, who had dared to act against them. They held all the cards, they fielded the largest armies and they controlled all of the important resources. It seemed impossible that their armies, led by men like Count Tilly who had never lost a battle, would ever be defeated. Because of this, the fruits of victory pursued by Ferdinand II, the Edict of Restitution which turned back the clock of the Reformation in the Empire, seemed destined to succeed despite Protestant opposition. Not so, said Gustavus.

While it seems almost automatic and inevitable that the King of Sweden would land in Germany and rampage throughout the Empire, defeating the Habsburgs and completely turning the tables of the war, the actual story surrounding Gustavus' motivation for intervention, and the fascinating steps which led him to triumph on the battlefield against the absolutist menace of Ferdinand II, were a great deal more multi-layered and complex than you may have imagined.

In the Thirty Years War series, I look forward to bringing the famous story of Gustavus Adolphus to you guys. His exploits and legacy are topics which continue to fascinate and grip people to this day.



## Post #7: Olivares

Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel Ribera y Velasco de Tovar, Count of Olivares and Duke of Sanlúcar la Mayor, Grandee of Spain - better known to us as Olivares, was the de facto Prime Minister of Spain from 1621-1648, and as such is a critically important figure for our narrative.

Today, Olivares is widely considered a failure. He over-exerted Spain abroad - renewing the war with the Dutch, excessively committing Madrid to the ruination of the Thirty Years War, and forced revolts to erupt in Catalonia and Portugal while he attempted to pay for it all. Olivares was the favourite of King Philip IV of Spain, but his failures would ultimately sentence him to condemnation and disgrace.

In our Thirty Years War series, we'll be investigating both sides of the conflict, the winners and the losers. Sometimes the losing side is more fascinating than its more successful rivals, for the simple fact that we can learn a lot about statecraft and how to not do diplomacy by their actions. I look forward to bringing you guys an analysis of Spain in the course of its terminal decline, and decline which was facilitated by the Thirty Years War, which was led by Olivares and which resulted in a Spanish collapse at the feet of France in 1659...



## Post #8: Frederick Henry

Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange was the military-political leader of the Dutch Republic from 1625 until his death in 1647. A critically important figure for the military and strategic revolutions he would implement during his time of rule, Frederick Henry is yet another example not only of the initial vibrancy of the House of Orange, but also of the overall vibrancy of the characters that rose to the top during this period.

Frederick Henry was the second significant son of William the Silent, the founding father of the Dutch House of Orange, as well as the half brother of Maurice of Nassau, that other leading light in Dutch military and political affairs. Frederick Henry assumed the reigns of the Dutch state in 1625 once his half brother died, and from that point onwards, took the Dutch people down a path which was ultimately to result in their complete independence and peace from Spain.

By 1647, peace was only a few months away from coming to the Empire and the Peace of Westphalia was right around the corner. For this incredible span of over twenty years, the Dutch Republic had fought tooth and nail with its former master, establishing itself in the process as one of the most important powers of Europe.



## Post #9: James I and VI

One of the most notable absences from the Thirty Years War in its early phases was that of England, but this didn't mean that King James of England and Scotland was sitting on his hands!

On the contrary, James engaged in some feverish diplomacy in the 1610's and early 1620s, largely because it had been his son in law, Frederick V of the Palatinate, that had been so involved in the early phases of the war, and because James was in search of a Spanish marriage to go along with this Protestant Palatine one, and for that he needed everyone to be at peace.

Incidentally, James' daughter Elizabeth would carry on the British royal line, until it resumed its position in Britain following some Hanoverian involvement, in 1714. A century before though, James was working desperately to reduce his foreign commitments and strengthen alliances, rather than make any deals (least of all with his son in law) that would result in increased British involvement in the war.

Between 1604-1624, James' policy was that of peaceful, if anxious co-existence with the rest of Europe, but this couldn't last forever. His second son Charles was far less peaceable, and would make it his mission to make some kind of mark in the developing conflict, in the aid of his brother in law, with disastrous consequences for all involved.



## Post #10: John George of Saxony

John George of Saxony was in a small group of men - in all of the duration of the Thirty Years War, only four European leaders lived through all of its trials, and this elector of Saxony was one of them.

Ruling over his prosperous, strategically important electorate from 1611-1656, John George was a permanent fixture of Imperial politics, and a very important man indeed during the early phases of the conflict.

Far from easily explained, his motives and actions retain a mixture of self-interest as well as religiously motivated behaviour. In the beginning John George was happy to dogpile on Frederick V, and the Saxon Elector was handed rights over Lusatia during the Bohemian revolt, and happily abandoned Frederick to his bleak fate. In the name of peace and the imperial constitution, John George claimed to be acting, and he made a show of standing up for Protestants, but in reality, he was powerless to stop Emperor Ferdinand's wrath.

With the Swedish invasion, Saxony's options would become limited and very complicated. In desperation did John George try and keep the peace and remain neutral, but this proved impossible. He was drawn against the Emperor by the Edict of Restitution, but above all by the threat of Swedish force, which had left a gaping hole in the Habsburg defences. John George was a flip-flopper at heart though, and quickly switched back to the Habsburgs in 1634, once it became clear that Ferdinand was gaining ground once more.

Overall, John George ruled Saxony at a time of that Electorate's peak. Despite the ruination inflicted upon his lands and peoples, John George was the most important Protestant ruler in Germany for the majority of that conflict, even while his troubled Protestant brethren all over the Empire were branching out on their own, most notably to the north-east, in Brandenburg...



## Post #11: Ernst of Mansfeld

Ernst of Mansfeld was a critically important mercenary commander in the early phases of the Thirty Years War, and until his death in 1626, represented everything that was annoying to the Habsburgs.

A sell-sword above all, Mansfeld's real talent was in raising an army, rather than commanding it. He won very few actual battles, yet his knack for creating an armed force and sending it out in double quick time made him immensely attractive to the hard pressed Protestant factions in the early years of the war. This was despite the fact that, until the end, Ernst sought ways to change sides and acquire more lands or monies for himself. He didn't want to be on the losing side, but he wasn't fussy about who he fought for so long as they paid him.

Ernst of Mansfeld anticipated what the Thirty Years War would look like - he was the hardened German mercenary leader who elongated the war and hired men of all classes and religions. His actions inflicted miseries upon many people, yet he also kept alive the hopes of Frederick V of the Palatinate so long as he lived to fight another day, even if that fighting was rarely successful, and ultimately in vain.

People like Ernst of Mansfeld are often forgotten in the grand narrative of the Thirty Years War. Yet, without him and people like him, the conflict could well have adopted a different course. Painful and brutal though his methods were, they represented what would be the tragically typical character of the war, and because of this, Ernst of Mansfeld's story is one that we must tell!



## Post #12: Sultan Murad IV

The Habsburgs were fortunate in their enemies, in particular the Ottoman Empire, which, following a war which ended in 1606, remained at peace with the Habsburgs until the middle of the 17th century. The period of peace was thanks in large part to the war between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, which lasted from 1623-1638, and was a success for the Turks.

This distraction ensured that there was to be no threat from the Turk for the duration of the Thirty Years War, yet this did not stop the enemies of the Habsburgs from trying to get the Turks on side. Sultan Murad IV (pictured) ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1623-1640, and his reign is best known for the aforementioned war with Persia, rather than for any intervention in the Thirty Years War.

It is certainly a question of what might have been - had French diplomacy managed to net Ottoman aid in the early 1630s, as had been done earlier in the 16th century, the outcome of the Thirty Years War could have been very different, Gustavus Adolphus may never have been killed in battle, and our world would probably look very different as well.

Funny then that nobody even talks about the Ottomans when talking of the Thirty Years War, save to say that they made peace in 1606. The Turk was important to the Habsburg because peace with the Turk meant a free reign in Europe. The diplomacy to keep the Turks sweet is yet another fascinating, underrated element of the Thirty Years War which I cannot wait to get into! Make sure you join me to learn all about it from 23rd May...



### **Post #13: Christian IV**

Our third figure who made it all the way through the Thirty Years War (just about), King Christian IV of Denmark was an immensely important Danish King not just for the history of the Thirty Years War, but also for Denmark and Scandinavia itself. The capital of Norway, Oslo, was named Christiania in his honour until 1925, which places his legacy, not on the same level as Constantine's but certainly up there in European history!

Christian IV came to the throne of Denmark in 1596 at the age of just 19. He faced challenges all across the board, from the Swedes, Poles, Russians, minor German princes and even his own nobility. To cut a long story short, Christian IV overcame these obstacles and neutered much of the opposition to the absolutist regime he sought, but his foreign adventures were his bread and butter and brought him great successes...at first.

Wars against Sweden in the early 1610s netted a lucrative peace treaty from that country and an acknowledgement of Danish economic and military supremacy in the Baltic, but this was to be the high point. The disastrous intervention of Denmark in the Thirty Years War from the mid-1620s brought ruin and devastation of Denmark, and greatly reduced the King's lustre.

Christian's greatest flaw was that he was not Gustavus, and once the Swedish King catapulted his country into stardom in the early 1630s, a major consequence was that the balance of power in the Baltic was never the same. Sweden's star, so long in Denmark's shadow, surged forward for the first time. Despite an attempt in the early 1640s to reverse this trend, Sweden remained in the ascendant, and when Christian died in 1648, technically before the peace of Westphalia had been signed, but we'll make some allowances for him, he would have known deep down that a great deal had changed.



## **Post #14: Sigismund III**

Our story of the Thirty Years War would not be complete without talking of Sigismund III of the House of Vasa, at one time King of Sweden and of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania, Duke of Prussia and father to a Russian Tsar. Sigismund's ambitions were as impressive as his they came, but unfortunately, Sigismund was as powerful and energetic as he was intolerant and stubborn. His was a story that began so strong and promising, but which was torpedoed thanks to his own bullishness and dogmatism.

King of Poland from 1587, Sigismund's story was interesting the moment he was born. The son of John III of Sweden and Catherine Jagiellonica, Sigismund's blood was of royal Swedish and Polish stock. Raised and educated by the Jesuits under the influence of his pious mother, Sigismund grew up a Catholic in a predominantly Lutheran country in Sweden, and this would prove his undoing.

He was, in many respects, the North European equivalent of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain from 1519-1555. Sigismund blended the bloods of two significant royal houses, that of Vasa and Jagiellonica, together. His parents clearly expected great things, and seemed to expect that their son would unite the Polish and Swedish lands together in a personal union, as Lithuania and Poland had done for several years. Yet, whereas Polish Kings had always been taught to show reverence and respect for their Lithuanian subjects, thus making the union of Poland-Lithuania possible, Sigismund was not so tactful when in Sweden.

Still, he was elected King of Sweden in 1592 upon the death of his father, and for several years ruled both Poland and Sweden as his parents had expected. By 1598 though, it was clear that his position was untenable. His Lutheran uncle Charles had positioned himself in Sweden to accumulate a great deal of influence and castles, thereby reducing Sigismund's ability to project his power considerably. Once Sigismund ordered the increasingly powerful Charles to stand aside, civil war began in Sweden, charged by the religious differences of its two leaders.

This religious difference in addition to Charles' powers brought about Sigismund's defeat and retreat from Sweden. From 1604 onwards, he would always claim the crown of Sweden, but he would be a King of that country only in the polite memorandums of his allies. In reality, his Lutheran uncle Charles was King. In 1604, Charles was crowned King Charles IX of

Sweden, and set in motion the turbulent relationship between the Swedish Lutheran House of Vasa and the Polish Catholic House of Vasa for the next 60+ years.

Sigismund's example is fascinating because it was the complete opposite of the Habsburg experience. There would be no two cooperating branches of the Vasa family, instead Northern Europe would see these Vasa cousins fight to the death for the several decades, and in the process dramatically shape the relations and development of Sweden, Poland, Russia and Denmark. The Thirty Years War, which contains several important chapters of this family feud, also contained some intriguing elements of Sigismund's dynastic ambitions, such as his marriage to a sister of Emperor Ferdinand II, and of Swedish efforts to orchestrate a Russian war against Poland, while Gustavus rampaged through Germany.



## Post #15: Archduke Albert

Archduke Albert was the ruler of the Spanish Netherlands in cooperation with his cousin Isabella, the daughter of King Philip II of Spain. Isabella and Albert were known as the Archdukes, and they played a prominent role in the diplomatic activity of the House of Habsburg in Europe, but in unexpected ways.

As we'll see, not only did the Archdukes restore the confidence of the population in the Spanish Netherlands, they also initiated some important diplomatic dealings. We'll look at their role in the peace between England and Spain (1604) and in the Twelve Years Truce between the Spanish and Dutch (1609). Throughout their tenure, the two figures remained popular, and upon Albert's death in 1621, the Spanish Netherlands reverted back to the King of Spain, who was then Philip IV.

Warfare was a common theme of the Netherlands region, and was conducted with tiresome sieges and a great deal of patience, which bred military geniuses from the House of Orange, but which also seemed, for a time at least, to lead to more sensible and diplomatically active figures taking charge in Brussels. If they couldn't beat them on the field, the thought process seemed to be that they COULD pacify them via the pen. In the twelve years of peace between the Dutch and Spanish (1609-21), the Spanish solidified their hold over the once troubled Netherlands rump state, largely thanks to the good governance of the Archdukes.

The Netherlands region erupted back into war from 1621 though, and this theatre of the Thirty Years War became critically important for the sake of the overall fight against the Habsburgs, which the Dutch, for a time, seemed to be spearheading. Our series will look at the significant rule of these two figures, and place it in the context of the Habsburg hegemony and Dutch resistance at the time, so I hope you'll join us for that!



## Post #16: Louis XIII of France

Louis XIII of France (1610-1643) had a very difficult task ahead of him. Coming to the throne at just 8 years of age, Louis was faced with all the strategic nightmares of his father, and he was far too young to do anything about it.

Not until he came of age in 1614 and expelled his mother's allies by 1620, would France be in a position to exert itself on the European stage, and this was just as well, because a year later the war between the Spanish and Dutch resumed, and the war in Germany reached a new phase as the Palatinate was occupied by Spanish and Bavaria soldiers. Habsburg influence thus increased, and the ineffectual Louis XIII was not entirely sure where to turn. Thankfully, Louis was blessed with talented men around him, much like his son would be for the remainder of the century.

France was to be ruled, not by its king absolutely, but by two eminently capable ministers brought to power by the King's perceptive knack for spotting and promoting talented men. The first of these was Cardinal Richelieu, while another important decision was approving of Richelieu's quest to groom a successor, which was found in Mazarin. Louis XIII died in 1643 due to an intestinal infection, but five days later, the Battle of Rocroi signalled the end of Spanish military supremacy. The great decline of Spain was about to begin.

In our series on the Thirty Years War, we consider figures like Louis XIII, often overlooked or underrated, for what they did do as much as what they did not. Louis didn't make a significant mark on European events until 1635, when France made war on the Habsburgs, but by waiting so long and not pulling the trigger, Louis, in cooperation with Richelieu, ensured that French forces would be as prepared as possible when the axe fell.



### **Post #17: Pope Urban VIII**

Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644) was Pope and head of the Catholic Church for 21 years of the Thirty Years War - a critical period of time and one which saw a great deal of crisis and change come over Europe in addition to the Catholic Church itself. Upon becoming Pope in 1623, the Venetian envoy said of Urban:

"The new Pontiff is 56 years old. His Holiness is tall, dark, with regular features and black hair turning grey. He is exceptionally elegant and refined in all details of his dress; has a graceful and aristocratic bearing and exquisite taste. He is an excellent speaker and debater, writes verses and patronises poets and men of letters."

Urban went on to greatly enrich his family members and encourage Galileo to recant his ideas, but he was significant in other respects as well. He repeatedly sought to encourage the Catholic French and Habsburgs to make peace, as was the never ending mission of so many Popes in this period. Predictably, nobody paid him much attention, and while he seemed more in favour of France than of the Habsburgs, having spent time in France as a Papal envoy, his support of France wasn't significant on its own to greatly affect that country's fortunes, though Cardinal Richelieu certainly valued his support.



## Post #18: Charles I

The English absence from the Thirty Years War is surprising on the surface, especially considering how recently Spain and England had waged war against one another. At its core though, the relative lack of English involvement was due to a lack of means and differences of opinion.

The one notable intervention in the conflict came in 1627, when the favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, led a harebrained scheme against the Huguenot fortress of La Rochelle, even while Charles I (pictured) was married to Henrietta Maria, a French princess. Charles' marital life was indeed complex - having originally been pegged to marry a Spanish princess, to counterbalance the Protestant match for his sister Elizabeth, in Frederick V of the Palatinate, Charles was snubbed by Madrid, who demanded he convert to Catholicism. With his failure to net a Spanish bride, King James' efforts to forge peace in Europe with English methods were also condemned to failure.

Charles was a great deal more active than his father had been in granting support to the mission of Frederick V, his brother in law. This favour, limited though it was, would be repaid many times over within a few decades, when Frederick's son Rupert fought for the Royalist cause. The exchange of offspring across the Channel was something to behold, as was the resulting interest in continental affairs. Anti-Catholic feeling was high at this point, but so too was a desire to reduce expenditure and prevent any frivolous adventures (like the siege of La Rochelle) from happening again. The result was mostly inaction, but serious discontent at home at the same time.



## Post #19: Maurice of Nassau

The Dutch penchant for sticking it to Spain was made possible thanks to the run of highly capable men of Orange. A son of William the Silent by his second marriage, Maurice of Nassau was a critically important figure not just in the Netherlands, where he ruled as Stadtholder from 1585 until his death in 1625, but also for European military thinking.

A pioneer of tactics, strategy and innovative approaches to sieges, Maurice was renowned in Europe as a master of the drill and as a Protestant juggernaut bravely doing battle against the fearsome Spanish. Due to his prominence in battle, Maurice was opposed to the Twelve Years Truce of 1609-21 at first, fearing that he would lose influence in peacetime. He came around though, and during this period of peace greatly increased the influence of his Orangist party over the republican Dutch, a conflict which continued in Dutch society until the French Revolution.

Maurice held the title of Captain-General of the army and Admiral of the Union, and while exploring Dutch sailors did take the opportunity to name Mauritius after him, it was on land that the prince of Orange truly excelled. Maurice transformed the Dutch revolt into a properly organised, coherent war against Spanish influence and power, and he can be credited with leading the Dutch to victory and guaranteeing the success of the revolt.



## **Post #20: Philip IV of Spain**

King Philip IV of Spain (1621-1665) was a classic case of too little too late for his country. While he made several efforts to reform and improve the terrible wastage and inefficiency in his Kingdom, Philip was ultimately powerless to turn back the tide of decline. His reign would see the unhappy culmination of years of neglect and bad governing practices. Thanks to the reduction in Spanish powers abroad and the changing situation of the Thirty Years War, Philip's reign was also one of demoralising Spanish defeats.

Revolt became an important event in Philip's lifetime. While the Spanish had been bungling the containment of the Dutch revolt for some time, revolts in Portugal and Catalonia from 1640 destroyed the Spanish power base and brought French influence right up the gates of Madrid. The reign of Richelieu was contrasted to the less impressive Olivares, who after all had much less to work with, and the latter was removed in 1643, when Spanish military prestige, perhaps its last remaining quality by this point, was seriously dampened at the Battle of Rocroi that same year.

Philip IV's story ties in handily with that of Spain - his was the reign of few victories, of increasing overextension and poverty in foreign wars, of trouble and revolt closer to home, as the systems set in place by his grandfather Philip II came undone. In short, Philip IV's reign represents the moment when the cracks could no longer be papered over with American gold and silver, and the problems which had been ignored for so long finally overwhelmed Spanish administration.

At the beginning of his reign, Philip IV ruled a world power of the first rank. In spite of its setbacks and many problems, Spanish power remained supreme and critically important for the maintenance of Habsburg influence in Europe. By his death in 1665 though, Spain had plainly been replaced by the majesty of France. Nowhere was this more clearly resembled than in the monarchs on both thrones. In France, Philip IV's nephew Louis XIV was enjoying his first few years of a reign which would last until 1715. Closer to home though, Philip would be succeeded by the horrifically inbred Don Carlos II, whom nobody expected to live past adolescence.

The story of the Franco-Habsburg rivalry and the Spanish decline within it is a critically important one for our narrative, so make sure you tune into our series on the Thirty Years War from 23rd May to learn all about it!



## Post #21: Ferd the Third

Ferdinand III, Holy Roman Emperor from 1637-1657, has been marked by some historians as the last Emperor to wield actual power over the Holy Roman Empire. Ruling in the last decade of the war, one which his father Ferdinand II had been instrumental in shaping, Ferdinand III's primary concern was that of peace, and he sought eagerly to bring this mission to life.

Ferdinand knew well the realities of the Habsburg situation, a situation which only grew worse in the 1640s. Vienna was broke, devoid of proper allies and dependent upon a lagging system of cooperation and I-owe-yous from Madrid. The tradition of alliance between the two Habsburg branches had cost Ferdinand III a great deal, but he refused to continue the war with France after 1648, in spite of the please from his cousin Philip IV, who we met yesterday.

Bringing a lasting peace to his Empire and rebuilding the powers of his family were the foremost goals in Ferdinand III's mind, and in our series on the Thirty Years War we'll investigate how he brought this plan to fruition, and how important it was for the emergence of the peace negotiations at Westphalia.



## Post #22: 'Axe Ox'

The other significant figure to last the duration of the Thirty Years War was not a King, but a mere Chancellor. Axel Oxenstierna ruled as High Chancellor of Sweden from 1613 until his death in 1654, and during the period of over 40 years, he saw a great many things change across the continent, largely under his direction.

Considered among the most important people in Swedish history, considering all he did at home for the later development of the Swedish state, Oxenstierna was also renowned in his time for directing the diplomatic arrangements of Sweden, and for wresting a great deal out of arrangements even while Sweden's position deteriorated.

Oxenstierna was singularly devastated by the death of Gustavus Adolphus, a boy he had watched grow into one of Europe's most important men, but it was from the point of Gustavus' death in 1632 that Oxenstierna's star became something akin to a comet, and the High Chancellor reached the greatest peak of his powers and influence. This wasn't to say that Axe Ox, as we took to calling him in our original series, wasn't pressed by challenges on many sides.

Sweden's biggest problem was that of money, and of paying the morass of professional soldiers, mercenaries and clingers on that constituted her major force in the late 1630s. The dynamism left Swedish armed forces with Gustavus' death, but Sweden remained a pivotal focal point of Protestant ambitions, and Oxenstierna directed these ambitions towards the furthering of Swedish interests across the continent.

His efforts brought him much admiration and praise, even from some surprising sources. Dutch jurist and philosopher Hugo Grotius considered Oxenstierna "the greatest man of the century". French Cardinal Richelieu called him "an inexhaustible source of fine advice", while Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, said that if all ministers of Europe were on the same ship, the helm would be handed to Oxenstierna. Pope Urban VIII claimed that Oxenstierna was 'one of the most excellent men the world had seen.'

Taking the reins of regency government after Gustavus' death, Oxenstierna forged a strong relationship with Queen Cristina, which ensured his staying power in Swedish society for the years after the Thirty Years War. He died in 1654, on the eve of the deluges which were to bring Sweden even more acclaim and triumphs. In our Thirty Years War series, Oxenstierna

is one of those figures that really fascinates us, so expect a great deal of time dedicated to this fascinating Swede from 23rd May!



## Post #23: Wallenstein

Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Wallenstein was a Habsburg generalissimo during some very important years of the Thirty Years War. A close ally of his Emperor Ferdinand II, Wallenstein was as much a soldier as he was a pious Bohemian Catholic of noble stock. Under his position and thanks to his financial and military support of Ferdinand II, Wallenstein was handed a great deal of duchies and lands in fief, since Ferdinand was never going to be capable of paying back this loyal servant.

Wallenstein was highly active in the war against Denmark and Sweden, providing, in the latter case, one of the few occasions when the Habsburgs attempted to stand their ground against the invading Swedes during Gustavus' initial romp through Germany. The Battle of Lutzen (November 1632) was technically a Habsburg defeat, but it was a Pyrrhic victory for Sweden, since their King had fallen in battle.

Wallenstein had been active since the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 cemented Habsburg domination over Bohemia, yet it was his actions later on and his unrivalled ability to raise many tens of thousands of men for battle - not to mention pay them on time - that won his Emperor's temporary loyalty. Temporary being the key word, for Ferdinand II was wary of Wallenstein's ambitions and was content to throw him under the bus at the worst possible time, in 1630, in order to get the approval of the princes for his son to succeed him.

After some disastrous defeats, Wallenstein stabilised the Habsburg military position, but he was never viewed as anything more than a dangerously ambitious grasping nobleman by his rivals, chief among them Maximilian of Bavaria, whose influence had been hurt by the independent Wallenstein's rise. Ultimately, Wallenstein's crime was not his ambition, but his knack for alienating so many people due to his success and influence. He was killed in 1634 by an Irish colonel in Imperial service, with Ferdinand II, the man whom Wallenstein had done so much for, giving his approval of the grisly deed.



## Post #24: Count Tilly

Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly (1559–1632) was a field marshal who commanded the Catholic League's forces in the Thirty Years War. From 1620–1631 he had an unmatched string of important victories against the Protestants, making himself indispensable to the Habsburgs in the process, and thoroughly frustrating all efforts by the Protestants to make any headway.

Tilly's service was the most important asset at the Habsburg disposal, even while officially, Tilly served the Catholic League and thus that League's head, Maximilian of Bavaria. Tilly's motives, as a pious Catholic and loyal Habsburg servant, are not in doubt, but he was certainly ill-prepared for the Swedes. As the most important soldier of the early phase of the war, he was also the most significant casualty of its middle phase, when he succumbed to the Swedes at Breitenfeld in September 1631 and died a few months later when struck by a Swedish cannonball.

While merely a commander, people like Tilly remind us that the Thirty Years War was above all affected by events on the battlefield, and the initial successes of Tilly will occupy us intensely in the early phases of our coverage of the conflict, so make sure you tune in from 23rd May to see what we make of it all!



## **Post #25: Bernard of Saxe-Weimar**

The example of Bernard of Saxe-Weimar provides us with a fascinating lens through which the river of battles and of luck flowed. Bernard (1604-39) entered the service of the Bohemian-Protestant-German mercenary army in the early 1620s, and while this force suffered successive defeats, he was not demoralised or put off war. Instead, he went to enlist in Danish service, and when the Danes were routed, he entered Dutch service.

Bernard was present during the Dutch siege of s'Hertogenbosch in 1629, and shortly thereafter entered Swedish service. Bernard's experience singled him out as an ideal candidate to lead Protestant forces during the 1634 Battle of Nordlingen, and even while his army was decisively defeated on that occasion, his appeal to would-be employers was not significantly diminished.

From 1635, after having seen a great deal of Swedish victories and defeats, Bernard was on the lookout for something more stable, and he found it in service to the French. It was for the next few years of his life that Bernard served French interests along the Rhine, while also representing the interests of German Protestants. He captured several important fortress towns for France, most notably Breisach in 1638.

Becoming a bit too big for his boots perhaps, Bernard's control over the Alsace region compelled him to negotiate for Richelieu to transfer these lands to him in fief as a loyal vassal prince of the French crown, rather than a mere commander. His ambitions, gargantuan as they were, could not overcome the perilous circumstances of the day, and Bernard died, just when Richelieu was beginning to seriously view him as a threat, in 1639. So perfectly timed was his death that some contemporaries believed Richelieu poisoned the 34 year old, but the reality was that Bernard, worn out from decades of constant war, succumbed to an early grave like so many of his military peers.

Bernard's example is an important one for what it tells us about this fascinating era. Serving the Danes, Swedes, Dutch, Bohemians, Protestants of all kinds and the French, Bernard of Saxe-Weimar saw it all, and we hope to bring more stories like his to you guys during our coverage of the Thirty Years War from 23rd May!

