

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN CAMPAIGN.

Lecture Delivered by Capt. Lee, of
the Royal Military College,
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COL. STARKE AND GENTLEMEN :

Before I commence my lecture, I should like to express my very great thanks to you for, in the first place, inviting me to come here, and, secondly, for your turning out this evening to hear a lecture which, though I hope it may be interesting to you, you came here taking your chances upon, so to speak, not knowing what the result might be.

I see that the lecture has been advertised as being on "The Franco-Prussian Campaign." I am afraid that title is, perhaps, a little too extensive for the lecture I shall be able to give this evening. In fact, when I call to mind the magnitude of the subject, I must ask your indulgence if my task be inadequately performed. To enter into a really satisfactory study of this great struggle, and to discuss all that arises from it, would take a month of evenings like this. Within the limits of one short lecture I can only deal with one portion of the war, and I shall confine my remarks this evening to that period between July 17 and September 1, 1870, that is, the period from the outbreak of hostilities to the downfall of the Empire at Sedan. That period is really the main portion of the war, and also that from which the most valuable strategical lessons are to be derived; and at its conclusion France was prostrate at the feet of Germany.

Before going on to the actual lecture itself, I feel bound to recognize the fact that there are a certain number of officers here of French-Canadian origin, who, though fully loyal to the British flag, yet, in case of war between France and Germany, their sympathies would naturally be with France. I wish to apologize to them (laughter) for having on this occasion to show up France in rather an unfavorable light; but I am sure they will acquit me of any bias in the matter. I am simply here to state facts as they occurred, and really cannot be responsible for the course of history.

Before turning to the actual hostilities, I will run through a brief sketch of the political situation before the war broke out. France and Prussia had long been rivals. The memories of the Napoleonic era ranked very deeply in both nations. Prussia was anxious to wipe out the memories of Jena and the numerous times Napoleon had almost destroyed her. On the other hand, France had very vivid recollections of 1814, and some of 1815 at Waterloo, and she was anxious that these memories should be wiped out. Further, the success of French arms in the Crimea in 1854, and Italy in 1859, had led the French nation to suppose that her military star was once more in the ascendant; and she hoped to wipe out past memories of Waterloo. The lesser war of 1866—Prussia against Austria—in which the Prussian arms were brilliantly successful, was a most unpleasant example to the French nation of the efficiency of the Prussian forces; and from that time France became jealous of Prussia grow-

ing in military power. From 1866 to 1870 it is no exaggeration to say that France was provoking a war, but was not preparing for it; whilst Prussia was protesting, but was at the same time steadily and silently preparing for the great struggle. At the beginning of 1870 the feeling between the two countries was running very high, and, although Prussia was anxious to avoid war, France was bent on provoking it, and finally her action resulted in hostilities.

The ostensible pretext for war was a ridiculous one. The French government objected to the candidature of the Prince of Hohenzollern for the Spanish throne, and the King of Prussia, as he was then, King William, gave his consent to the withdrawal of the candidature, which was done. France, not satisfied with this, demanded that, whatever occurred in the future, the King of Prussia should never favor the candidature of the Prince of Hohenzollern for the Spanish throne. The government of Prussia could not be dictated to in this way, and refused to discuss the question, and the French minister, Benedetti, left Berlin on July 13th, 1870. War was declared on the 17th, and the declaration was received in Berlin on the 19th. The French nation went into this war with a light heart. The Chamber voted \$100,000,000 for the immediate prosecution of the war, and the French Prime Minister Ollivier and the Minister of War Le Bœuf assured the people that every man was ready down to the last button on the last man's gaiters. The cry all through France was "To Berlin!" Naturally, all Europe was impressed with it, and concluded that France would assume the offensive and invade Germany. When the French declared war they counted largely on the want of co-operation between South Germany and Prussia. Now Germany is a united empire, but then North Germany was the Kingdom of Prussia, and there were a number of states in South Germany—Baden, Wurtemberg, etc.—each with its own king. So far as internal affairs were concerned, these states were not in close sympathy with Prussia, and France calculated on the fact of these jealousies, and that probably South Germany would remain neutral, and that she would only have to deal with Prussia. The first surprise came when the South German states threw in their lot with Prussia and stood united in the face of the common enemy. This had one effect, it gave France a larger field of attack; it gave her South Germany as well, and so laid open the whole country.

The French were really in no condition for war at all. In the first place, they were hopelessly inferior in numbers. France, at the beginning of August, 1870, could not put more than 260,000 efficient troops into the field, besides which she had about 300,000 reserves; but 260,000 troops were all that were available. The Prussians could put, at least, 460,000 regular troops in the field, and had 700,000 reserves behind. Now, turning to other points of the French army, and taking, first of all, their arms, their rifle, the chassepot, was undoubtedly superior to the Germans' needle-gun; but their artillery was inferior to that of the Germans in condition and efficiency. The National Guards were simply an armed log, and the regular army was weakened by the great preferences for substitutes, men in the ranks being able to purchase substitutes. The ranks were thus filled with men not fit for the work. It is an undeniable fact that the French officers were inferior, owing to political and social reasons; they had not that moral tone which inspired the confidence of the men, and they were filled with over-weening, self-esteem and contempt for the Ger-

mans, besides which their men had practically no confidence in them, as was shown throughout the war. The organization of the French forces was about as bad as it could be. The first thing they suffered from was over-centralization. When the order to mobilize went out there were no suitable railways to transport the men from the interior to the frontier. There were four lines of railway running altogether; but they were simply commercial railways, and were unavailable for the French system of mobilization, under which there were large depots of stores in the interior and large forces near the frontier. The men forming the army lived in different parts of the country, and were forwarded by rail to the frontier, where they were supposed to be served with accoutrements food, etc., and to be sorted out into their different ranks. It might have come all right in time; but hopeless confusion resulted. Men on arriving at Metz found their boots were at Strasburg, and things which should have been at Thionville were found at Nancy. The staff officers were inefficient, and were giving contradictory orders; men were wandering aimlessly about in all directions, and before the end of July it became evident that the French army was quite incapable of taking the offensive, and was quite inferior in numbers.

Over the whole period from 1866 onwards the Germans had been preparing for this great war, and every detail had been worked out. At the end of 1868 and beginning of 1869 Von Moltke issued a memorandum for a possible campaign against France, drawing up in detail the movements of every man, practically, and including time-tables of every train. War was practically declared on July 16, and on that date a single message, "Crede mobile," was flashed over the wires all over Germany, and within two hours this vast machine was put in motion. These two words lighted the train, and within the period July 16-23 mobilization was completed in every detail. From July 23rd to August 2nd, the concentration of the troops by rail took place. The army corps were mobilized in their own districts, and were transported to the front. In that period the German forces of 460,000 were mobilized to the appointed rendez-vous.

To take the plans of the opposing sides, the French, in their first light-hearted feelings, calculated on being able to concentrate with superiority of rapidity to the Germans, and that this superiority of rapidity would enable them to surprise the enemy. Their idea was to attack South Germany first. They were going to mobilize their arms, consisting of seven army corps, in the following manner: There was to be one at Strasburg, under Bazaine, of 100,000 men; 150,000 more at Metz, under Marshal MacMahon, and 50,000, under Canrobert, at Chalons. Their idea was that the Metz and Strasburg armies should combine, cross the Rhine about Carlsruhe, and fall on South Germany before Prussia could come to its assistance. They expected to easily overwhelm South Germany, and proposed to operate from there along the River Mayne, and so turn the German flank in exactly a similar way to what Napoleon did at Jena, in 1806. They then proposed to strike up to Berlin, having made terms with South Germany, and would only have Prussia to deal with. The frontier formed a regular salient angle into Germany. To the north-east and east of France was the Palatinate and the neutral territory of Luxemburg, and to the south-east was Switzerland. Therefore, the possible line of invasion was restricted to the gap between Luxemburg and Switzerland. Unless they wished to violate the neutrality