

# BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 4 ★ Issue 4

Early European & Asian Wars:

## Lützen

DATE:

Nov. 16, 1632

LOCATION:

Near Leipzig, Germany

### OPPOSING FORCES

**Allied Army:** 19,000 men (12,800 pikemen and musketeers, 6,000 cavalry) and 24 cannons, commanded by King Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden. These numbers include his Saxon allies, along with Scottish and other mercenaries.

**Imperial Army:** 17,000 men (8,000 pikemen and musketeers, 9,000 cavalry) and 24 cannons, commanded by Prince Albrecht von Wallenstein. This includes the forces added by Prince Gottfried Heinrich von Pappenheim during the battle.

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

By 1618, complex religious alliances, dynastic influences, and mercenary ambitions had thrown Europe into the tumultuous Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). As the war spread, King Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden brought his army across the Baltic Sea to aid the Protestant cause. But this was no ordinary army. Gustavus's army, often considered the first "national" army, was organized and trained differently than the others of the time. In fact, its success on the battlefield would help usher in fundamental changes in the character of warfare. Gustavus's final act, however, was in 1632 at the Battle of Lützen. In this bloody struggle, the "Lion of the North" – the man who helped create the dawn of modern war – was killed. And although he had changed warfare, his loss would prevent Sweden from becoming a dominant power on the European continent.



King Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden

and Poland, including Austria, Hungary, Saxony, Bohemia, and hundreds of Imperial estates and principalities. This rickety extension of Charlemagne's empire from before the year 800 was a confederation nominally led by an emperor chosen by electors from seven powerful royal families across Europe.

But tensions had been roiling between Catholics and Protestants for a hundred years. They finally boiled over in 1618 when the dying emperor Matthias, King of Bohemia, threw his support behind his cousin, the anti-Protestant Archduke Ferdinand II von Habsburg, for the throne. When an upset group of Bohemian Protestant nobles in Prague revolted, they went so far as to throw some Matthias loyalists out a window to their deaths in what became known as the Defenestration of Prague. After they put forward their own candidate, Frederick the Elector Palatine, to oppose Ferdinand, Ferdinand declared war. Soon, most Catholic principalities sided with Ferdinand, while many Protestant princes sided with Frederick. And although numerous other threads of competition and animosity were interwoven into the conflict, the battle lines were drawn.

After Matthias's death in March of 1619, Protestant forces invaded Austria. But after driving them back, Ferdinand secured the votes to be emperor. The war might have ended the following year when two Catholic armies—one from the Spanish Netherlands and the other from Austria—converged to defeat the unprepared Protestants near Prague, forcing Frederick and his nobles to flee.

Unfortunately, the anti-Protestant Ferdinand only fanned the flames. "Better to rule over a desert than a country full of heretics," he famously exclaimed.<sup>1</sup> Persecuted Protestants, meanwhile, began looking outside of Germany for help.

### STRATEGY & MANEUVER

**Actions by the Imperialists (Catholics)** – After the Protestant Reformation, the seventeenth century became a bloody transition period in Europe. The feudal system of the Middle Ages was giving way to an emerging concept of nation-states. And while old dynasties clung to power through intense religious and military crosscurrents, the devastating Thirty Years' War became the central vortex of the time, eventually spreading from Germany to France, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The Holy Roman Empire

As the war expanded, the Bourbons of Catholic France entered on the Protestant side. Clearly, their religious interests took a back seat to their quest for new lands and desire to undermine their rival Habsburgs in Spain. The Protestant Dutch joined the war, as well, primarily to get support for their ongoing war with Spain. In addition to these dynastic rivalries, many types of mercenary armies – adept at plundering and pillaging for compensation – gladly played along.