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Geoffrey Wawro

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The Franco-Prussian War

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 violently changed the course of European history. Alarmed by Bismarck’s territorial ambitions and the Prussian army’s crushing defeats of Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866, French Emperor Napoleon III vowed to bring Prussia to heel. Digging into many European and American archives for the first time, Geoffrey Wawro’s *The Franco-Prussian War* describes the war that followed in thrilling detail. While the armies mobilized in July 1870, the conflict appeared “too close to call.” Prussia and its German allies had twice as many troops as the French. But Marshal Achille Bazaine’s *groggnards* (“old grumblers”) were the stuff of legend, the most resourceful, battle-hardened, sharp-shooting troops in Europe, and they carried the Chassepot, one of the world’s best rifles. From the political intrigues that began and ended the war to the bloody battles at Gravelotte and Sedan and the last murderous fights on the Loire and in Paris, this is a stunning, authoritative history of the Franco-Prussian War.

Geoffrey Wawro is Professor of Strategic Studies at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. His previously published books include *The Austro-Prussian War* (Cambridge, 1996) and *Warfare and Society in Europe, 1792–1914* (2000). He is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including the Austrian Cultural Institute Prize and the Society for Military History Moncado Prize for Excellence in the Writing of Military History. He is also the host and anchor of the History Channel’s *Hardcover History*, a weekly interview show with leading historians, statesmen, and journalists.

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The Austro-Prussian War

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Stempel Garamond 10/12 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Wawro, Geoffrey.

The Franco-Prussian War : the German conquest of France
in 1870-1871 / Geoffrey Wawro.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-58436-1

1. Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1871. 2. France - History - Second Empire, 1852-1870.
3. Germany - History, Military - 19th century. I. Title

DC293.W38 2003

943.08'2 - dc21 2002041685

ISBN 0 521 58436 1 hardback

Cambridge University Press

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For Winslow and Matías

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Abbreviations

ACM	Archives Centrales de la Marine (Vincennes)
BKA	Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv (Munich)
CIS	Congressional Information Service (Washington, DC)
HHSA	Haus-Hof-und Staatsarchiv (Vienna)
NA	National Archives (Washington, DC)
ÖMZ	Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (Vincennes)
SKA	Sächsisches Kriegsarchiv (Dresden)
ZS	Zeitgeschichtliche Sammlung (Dresden)

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Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to my sons, who almost magically took on the qualities of the French and the Prussians as I delved deeper into the material. Five-year-old Winslow became the incandescent Frenchman, swerving from side-splitting hilarity to academic introspection to *furia francese*. Three-year-old Matías, with his defiant chin, wide eyes, and white-blond shock of hair, metamorphosed into the valiant Prussian. In their regular scraps, Winslow bowls his brother over with superior weight and *élan*; Matías unfailingly clambers back with defiance, endurance, and pluck. Like the beleaguered German troops of Coulmiers or Beaune-la-Rolande, he refuses to yield. These adorable boys – and Cecilia, their hard-working, loving mother – have made my life happier and more interesting, and this book is for them.

The deep archival research and battlefield tours needed for this book would have been impossible without research fellowships. “War is a deep hole that needs constant filling” is an old Swiss proverb that applies equally to the study of war. The *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch-Dienst* (DAAD) very generously provided me with a Faculty Study Visit Grant, which paid for three or four months of work in German archives. And the DAAD grants seemed even more generous because they were issued in cash. One found one’s way to a German city – Munich, Dresden, or Berlin – and then tracked down the bursar in some grim postwar university building. Hundreds of *Deutschmarks* were counted into your hand by a disbelieving clerk. You left feeling more like a buccaneer than a professor, with wads of fifty and hundred-mark notes stuffed in every pocket. For those fleeting moments of sheer avaricious delight, I am also grateful.

Thanks are also due to Oakland University and the U.S. Naval War College. Oakland awarded me a handsome Faculty Research Fellowship for a second summer of research in Germany, Austria, England, and France, which included a mad dash in a rented Citroën to see every battlefield between Sedan and Froeschwiller. The U.S. Naval War College gave me time off to work in

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European archives and dash around the Loire battlefields in a Peugeot. The Austrian Cultural Institute in New York kindly permitted me to defer my dissertation prize several years so that I could spend it in Vienna on coffee houses, *Heurige*, the Austria versus Latvia World Cup qualifier, and research for this book. When the money ran out, I lodged with friends, who were always hospitable: Marc Bataillon, Jean Guellec, and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau in Paris, Lothar Höbelt in Vienna, and David and Caroline Noble in London. Thanks also to my patient, efficient editor, Frank Smith, and to the colleagues who have supported my work in so many ways. Rick Atkinson, Michael Beschloss, Arden Bucholz, Alberto Coll, Niall Ferguson, Michael Howard, Henry Kissinger, and Dennis Showalter have all offered advice and encouragement. The book has been much improved by Professor Holger Herwig's careful reading. Holger made a number of important suggestions and corrections, and deflected me from one or two *faux-pas*, like the regiment of Bavarian infantry that I had marching down a road singing Lutheran hymns.

In all of my books I feel a great responsibility to the thousands of young men killed or maimed in battle, remembered briefly by their grieving families, and then forgotten in our rush toward the future. This book may serve as a memorial to their brave efforts. I thought of such men on my way back to Paris from Metz, when I read the following words on the wall of the mausoleum at Verdun: "*Der Krieg, mein Lieber, das ist unsere Jugend, die hier vergessen in der Erde ruht*" – "War is our youth, my friend, lying forgotten here in the ground."

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

2003