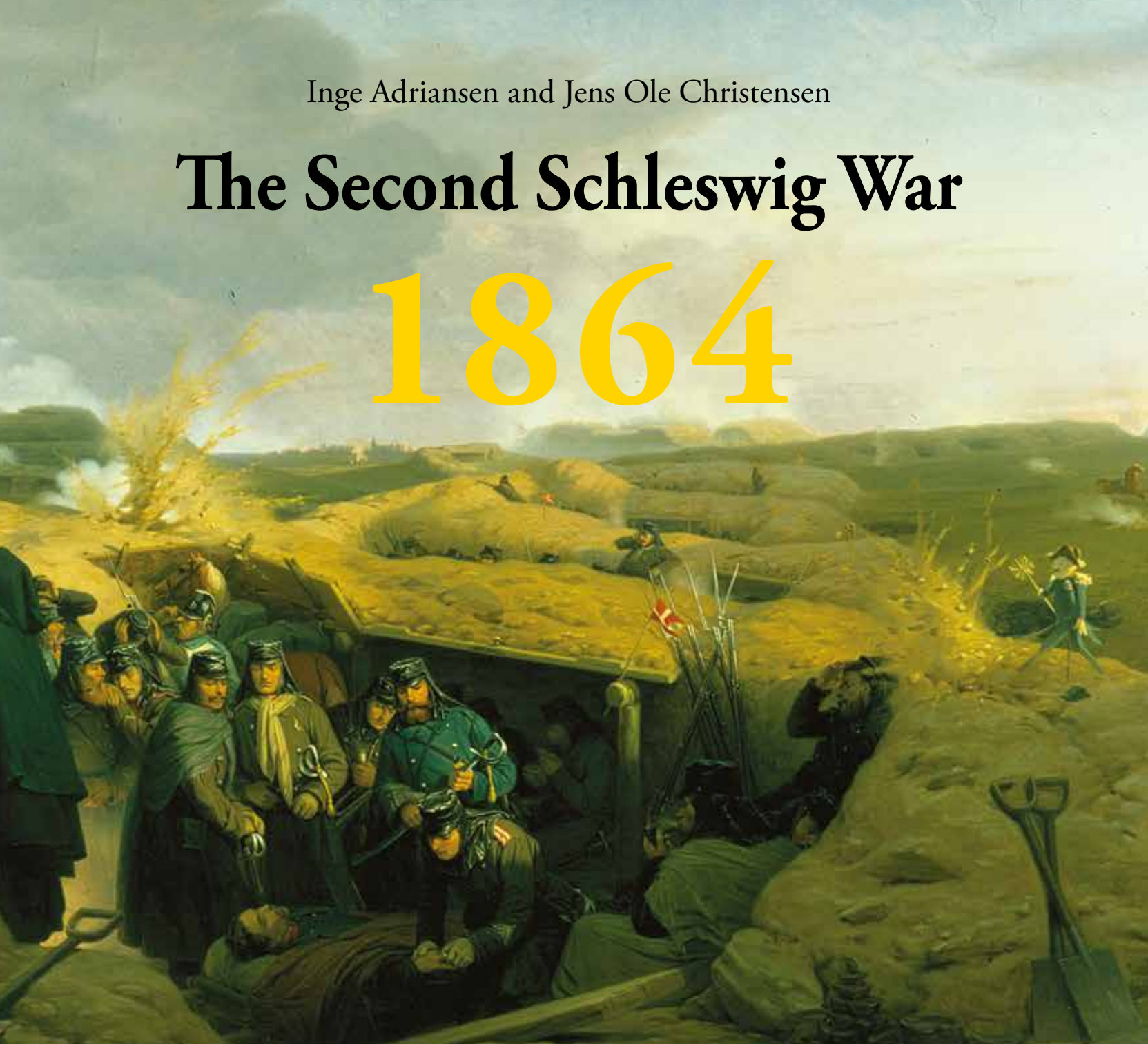


Inge Adriansen and Jens Ole Christensen

# The Second Schleswig War

# 1864





Map of the Unified Danish Monarchy after the English Wars, showing the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg. Printed in 1817 for use in schools.

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## Prelude, Events and Consequences



Sønderborg Slot – Tøjhusmuseet

# Preface

More than 3,500 articles and books have been published in Danish and German about the War of 1864. In these publications, every brave deed and every political error of judgement have been minutely scrutinised – often with the deceptive clarity of hindsight. So is there any reason to write more about this bygone, and for many people forgotten, period of history? Well, yes, we think there is: and so we have put together this short account of the War: the prelude to it, the events, the consequences.


The defeat of Denmark in the War of 1864 has helped form the national consciousness, and was the experiential basis on which Danish domestic and foreign policies were shaped for more than a hundred years. The defeat has also had positive effects, in that the Danish population managed to rise from its knees and build a new Denmark with a high degree of self-organisation and cooperative awareness.

The war has given rise to a culture of remembrance in the border region, both in Denmark and Germany. Annual ceremonies and days of remembrance reflect the comprehensive analysis of the past that has been taking place in Danish society since the 1980s, and such events are a vital expression of the present atmosphere of constructive cooperation between Denmark and Germany.

By presenting the main outlines of these developments, we hope to encourage readers to read even more, and to venture out on visits to museums and battlefield sites.

*Inge Adriansen*  
Sønderborg Slot

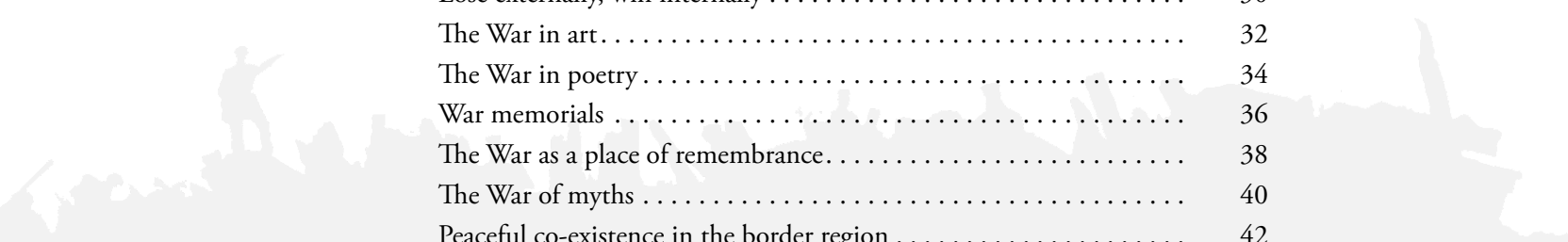
*Jens Ole Christensen*  
Tøjhusmuseet

A decorative illustration at the bottom of the page features a silhouette of a landscape with rolling hills on the left and a group of soldiers on the right. The soldiers are in various poses, some standing, some sitting, and some holding long poles or rifles. The style is minimalist and uses a light grey color against the white background.

This book is published in Danish, German and English – made possible by support from Alving Fonden, Helen og Ejnar Bjørnows Fond, Historisk Samfund for Als og Sundeved, Jyllands-Postens Fond, Konsul Georg Jorck og Hustru Emma Jorck's Fond, Marinehistorisk Selskab / Orlogsmuseets Venner, Nikolai og Felix Fonden, Oberst H. Parkovs Mindefond, Oticon Fonden, Selskabet Tøjhusmuseets Venner og Sydbank Fonde. We would like to extend our warm thanks to all who have contributed.

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# The long prelude to the War

The Treaty of Vienna in 1815 concluded the long and destructive period of European wars that had lasted more or less since the French Revolution of 1789. The Treaty provided the framework for a new Europe: a Europe of Princes, not of the people. The liberal, national ideas exemplified by the American and French Revolutions were identified as the cause of all the miseries of the decades of war. The Great Powers of Europe, especially Russia, were fiercely determined to fight revolutionary ideas with all means at their disposal.

The Danish State, also called the Unified Monarchy of Denmark, was quite different from the Denmark of today. It was an absolute monarchy comprising two nationalities. At the end of the English Wars (1801-1814), it was obliged to cede Norway to Sweden, and consisted after that time of two main parts: the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg. There were two major centres of power: Copenhagen and Kiel respectively (cf. the map on the inside flap of the front cover). The Unified Monarchy was not a state or a nation in the modern sense of the terms, but 'The Kingdoms and Domains of the King', and what bound it together was the King himself and the law of succession of the royal family. The three Duchies did not have the same status, in that Holstein and Lauenburg, though not Schleswig, were members of The German Confederation, a loose association of independent Duchies with a Federal Assembly in Frankfurt.

After 1815, liberal and nationalist ideas began to spread

in the middle classes throughout Europe. The central concepts in these circles were that power was from the people and not from absolute monarchs, and that people belonged to a particular nation, that is, a people and a fatherland characterised by a common history, language and culture. Within the Unified Monarchy of Denmark, too, politically aware citizens demanded the dissolution of the absolute monarchy and the static hierarchy of rank, and called for the drawing up of a constitution. In 1834, advisory Assemblies of the Estates of the Realm were introduced, since Holstein and Lauenburg were entitled to such as members of the German Confederation, and the Danish King did not want there to be any differences between German and Danish federal states within the Unified Monarchy.

In the 1840s, the liberal opposition crystallised into two national liberal movements: a Danish-Schleswig movement in Copenhagen, and a German-Schleswig-Holstein movement in Kiel. National antitheses were very much to the fore in these movements, as both laid claim to the Duchy of Schleswig, where the population in the northern part were Danish speakers and those in the southern part German speakers.

In 1848, there was a wave of liberal national revolutions all over Europe, and this affected the Unified Monarchy of Denmark. It was not just the absolute monarchy that broke down under the threat of revolution, but the Unified Monarchy itself, in that two governments were formed, each with their national affiliation: a Danish(-

Schleswig) government in Copenhagen and a Schleswig-Holstein government in Kiel. Schleswig was the focal point of conflict, and there ensued a long, bitter and bloody civil war between the two parts of the Unified Monarchy: The First Schleswig War 1848-1851. This war soon developed into an international conflict that attracted the attention of the major powers.

This historical period was not only characterised by nationalist struggles, but also by democratic movements. A Constituent Assembly set up by the government of Schleswig-Holstein prepared a liberal constitution which was passed in September 1848. In the Kingdom of Denmark, too, a Constituent National Assembly was set up to write a liberal constitution, which was passed in June 1849. This 'Constitution of the Kingdom of Denmark' was meant to apply to the whole unified state, but because of the civil war it was at the time only applicable to the Kingdom of Denmark.

The Danish army won victories at Fredericia in 1849 and Isted in 1850. These successes did a lot to boost morale, but nothing to change the political situation, and they only had limited results in military terms. In fact, they laid the foundation for a mood of military over-confidence, which would later have catastrophic results. The situation towards the end of 1850 was such that neither the Danish nor the Schleswig-Holstein army could win a decisive victory. The major powers, led by Russia, wanted to stop the civil war and remove all traces of the 1848 revolutions; neither Danish-Schleswig, nor Schleswig-Holstein nationalist ambitions harmonised with their desire to restore the old order of things. Since all military options were exhausted, both sides were forced to go along with the demands laid down by the major powers.

In January 1851, Schleswig-Holstein was forced to surrender, and to dissolve both its government and itself as a State. The Danish National Liberal government was forced to stand down in favour of a conservative government, which in 1851 and 1852 entered into a number of international agreements based on the status quo before 1848. In these agreements, the Danish government promised that one common constitution would be introduced for the whole Unified Monarchy, that Schleswig would not be more closely linked to the Kingdom of Denmark than Holstein, and that all constituent parts of the Unified Monarchy would be equal. The Duchies were still absolutist, though with advisory Assemblies of the Estates of the Realm, so it was vital for the Unified Monarchy to shape a new constitution that could gather together all its parts, and at the same time satisfy the major powers.

The Unified Monarchy was restored in formal terms, but made little headway at the popular level: national tensions were just too predominant. The population of Southern Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg felt a close affinity with the German people, not with the Danish. The borders of state and nation were thus not identical.

Alongside the attempt to create a new constitution that was not in conflict with the agreements of 1851-1852, a policy of Danification was very unwisely being pursued in Central Schleswig – unwisely because it helped keep the Schleswig question alive, both in the public sphere in Germany and in the awareness of the major powers.

In 1855, the Danish government passed a common, bilingual constitution with one Council of State for the whole Unified Monarchy, attempting to link the Kingdom's democratically-elected National Assembly, which

held legislative power, with the conservative political organs of the Duchies, which were merely advisory. The first session of the Council of State in 1856 ended in failure; national tensions proved to be insurmountable obstacles. The constitution did not put the Duchies on an equal footing with the Kingdom, and the proposal was therefore rejected by the Holstein Assembly of the Estates of the Realm that same year, and in 1858 it was declared invalid by the German Federal Assembly in Frankfurt.

The German requirement that the Duchies should each enjoy the same influence as the Kingdom of Denmark with its considerably larger population was completely unacceptable to the Danish government, which opted to rescind the common constitution as far as Holstein and Lauenburg were concerned. At this point, Schleswig was not involved in the constitutional wrangle – but not for long.

As all this was going on, there was a significant change in the balance of power in Europe. In 1856, the heavy defeat of Russia in the Crimean War weakened the conservative Russian grip on European politics. Instead, France attempted to assume the role of the dominant major power on the Continent. Inspired by the unification of Italy, the liberal German National Association was formed in 1859 with the aim of creating German unity ‘from the bottom up’, while other more conservative elements, such as the Minister President of Prussia, Otto Bismarck, were also working towards the same goal. Bismarck saw a struggle on two fronts: against expansionist France on the one hand and German National Liberals on the other. He aimed to gather the German states under Prussian leadership, bypassing the National Liberals. Since the Schleswig question was an important

element in the efforts of the liberals to gain popular support, finding a solution to it would strengthen the position of Bismarck and conservative forces in general.

In negotiations with the Danish government on the matter of the constitution, the idea of a divided Schleswig was proposed by neutral and German powers alike, but the idea was totally indigestible to the majority of Danish politicians and to nationalist circles in the population. Schleswig they regarded as part of the Danish State, the loss of which would deal a severe blow to the national honour. Nor did the majority of the population in Schleswig, including those of Danish persuasion, want the province to be divided.

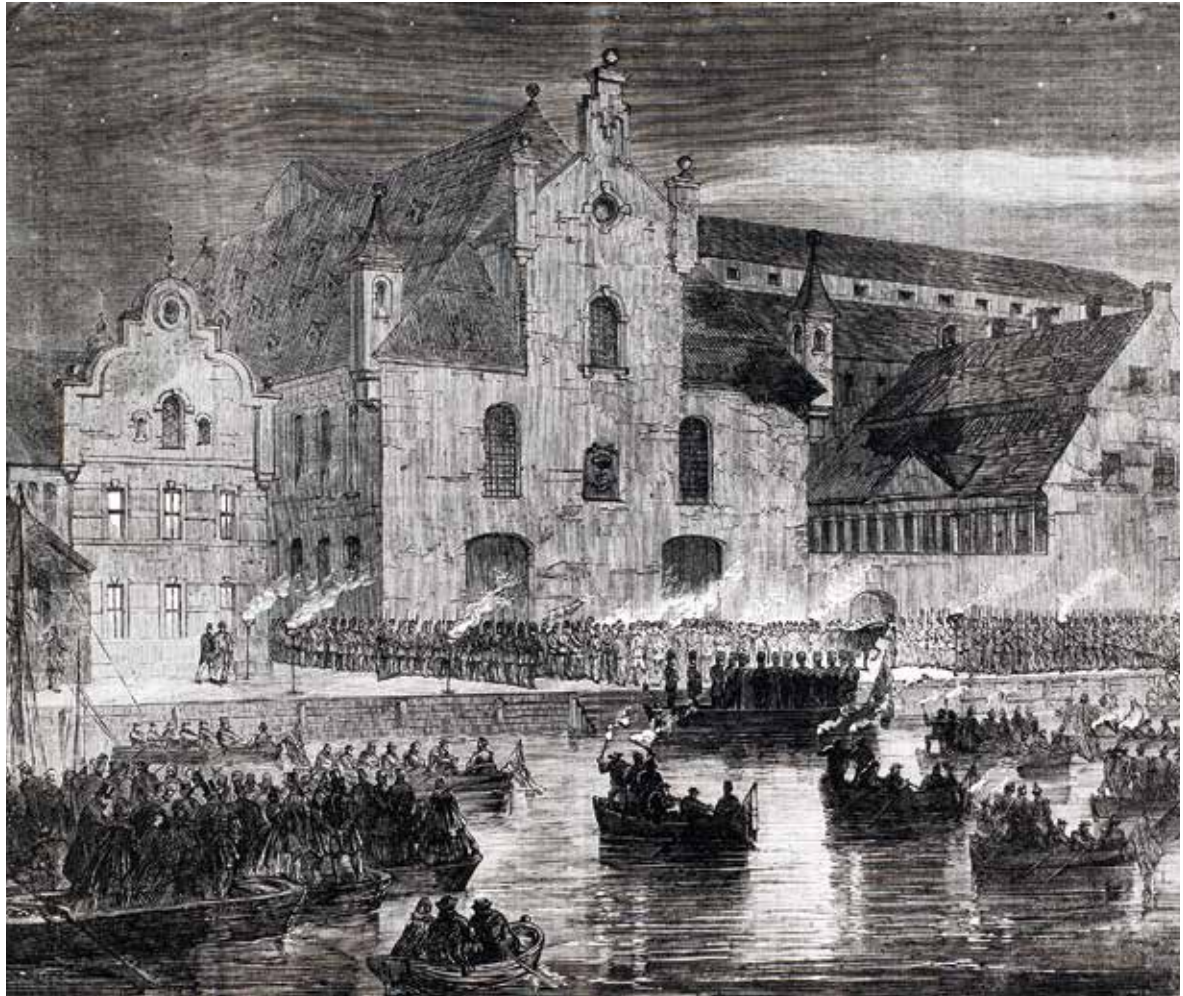
From 1857, the National Liberals were again in power in Denmark. Convinced that concessions to the German Federal Assembly and the Holstein Assembly would only lead to further demands, they abandoned the Unified Monarchy policy in favour of the ‘Ejder Policy’, that is, linking Schleswig even closer to the Kingdom of Denmark. In March 1863, a new constitution was proclaimed that embraced the Kingdom of Denmark and Schleswig, thus excluding Holstein and Lauenburg. Even though this constitution did not formally make Schleswig part of the Kingdom, it clearly contravened the international agreements of 1851-1852, putting Denmark on a collision course with the great powers, the German States and the majority of the citizens in the Duchies. Few doubted that it would all end in war, preparations for which were begun in the course of 1863. On 13 November, the new constitution was passed by the Council of State, but King Frederik VII, who was in Schleswig, never managed to sign it: after inspecting the troops at Danevirke, he fell ill and died quite unexpectedly on 15 November. His successor, Chris-



tian IX, earnestly appealed to the government, warning that the November constitution would lead to war and end in a catastrophe. But the government was under extreme pressure; a jingoist, nationalist fever was sweeping through the population, and the new King was constrained to sign the constitution under the clamour

of rioting and demonstrations in the streets of Copenhagen. In January 1864, Prussia and Austria called for the November constitution to be rescinded. The Danish government was forced to reject this demand, and so there was only one course left to take: war.

*The coffin of Frederik VII arrives in Copenhagen in November 1863. With flaring torches the sarcophagus is transported on a chaloupe from the steamship, Schleswig, to the Copenhagen Arsenal and thence to the chapel at Christiansborg Castle.*



## Threat scenarios and defence plans

In terms of national security, the threats facing the Unified Monarchy after the First Schleswig War were nationalist tensions which eroded the homogeneity of the State, and the strained relationships with the German States. Taken overall, though, the threat scenarios were far more complicated. With the memory of the British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807 still fresh in people's minds, until the end of the 1850s the most serious threat was the danger of becoming embroiled in the war between Great Britain and Russia. This danger was most keenly felt during the Crimean War of 1854-56, after which it receded. The threat from the German States, however, especially Prussia, became more urgent, as from 1861 the Danish government resurrected the Ejder policies.

The First Schleswig War had exposed a number of political and military weaknesses in the Danish armed forces: the top-down structure from the absolute monarchy had not been successfully replaced; tasks and responsibilities had not been properly allotted at the political and military levels; and neither the defence ministries nor the command structure of the armed forces had been properly organised. Moreover, during the war there had been too little coordination between the War Ministry and the Admiralty and between the forces under their command. To this should be added the lack of officer training – especially at the highest levels – in the years between the wars. The army was primarily organised to withstand a British or Russian attack on Zealand and Copenhagen; it was not geared to meet the threat of a German attack

on the Jutland peninsula. To make matters worse, there was one particular serious and delicate problem: a large number of soldiers in the army came from the Duchies, which felt little loyalty to the Unified Monarchy. Finally, the navy was badly fitted out, and defences on land were antiquated to say the least. None of these problems had been tackled in the years between the wars, a fact which became painfully obvious during the Second Schleswig War.

In the 1850s, the Danish armed forces were reviewed by a number of commissions, whose point of departure was in the first place the British and Russian threat to Zealand and Copenhagen. Neither in political or military circles was there any clear recognition of the defensive problems posed by a possible war between Denmark and Germany. The main defensive strategy was that Danish naval superiority was to be used offensively, partly in the form of a trade blockade, presumed to be effective against the German States, and partly to secure the Danish islands, releasing land forces for operations on the Jutland peninsula. Correspondingly, Danish military inferiority on land was to be counterbalanced by a defensive approach to warfare on the peninsula, including using the defensive strength of various fortifications, which it was thought would enable a long period of defensive action leading to international intervention. The first defensive step on land was to be a short frontal defence at the Danevirke. This would be followed up by a longer period of flank defence at Dybbøl and Fredericia.

The primary significance of frontal defence was the political and symbolic defence of the territory and population of Schleswig, which was the central bone of contention with the German States. The whole idea was to force the enemy to operate in an area that was advantageous to the defending forces, which entailed fortifying the narrowest place on the Jutland peninsula, at the ancient Danevirke fortification – from the wide fjord of the Schlei in the East to the broad wetlands in the West. As the areas on the flanks were difficult to negotiate, any attack had to be directed at the narrow, fortified area in the middle, where an aggressive defensive action would delay the attackers and prevent them advancing around the centre.

Conversely, the idea behind defensive flank positions was to force potential attackers to spread their forces, enabling the Danes to attack enemy units one by one, concentrating their resources by using the Navy to deliver troops where they were needed. The flank defence was primarily conceived as a means to draw out hostilities and prevent foreign troops from pressing on into Jutland.

In the minds of the defence strategists, frontal defence was originally conceived as a short-term operation, but the Danevirke fortification was the stuff national myths are made of – possessing a mythological power which politicians and officers helped promote. The result was that in military terms the Danevirke was accorded a dominating position that in no way corresponded to its real military value.

The Danevirke and Dybbøl were operationally reinforced between 1861 and 1863, and some minor improvements were made at Fredericia. After improvements, the fortifications at the Danevirke corresponded to the brief

defensive role originally conceived for the place, but in contrast neither the Dybbøl position nor the fortress at Fredericia were strengthened sufficiently to provide the long-term defensive positions called for by the military. So, a disproportionate amount of the limited resources available were used on the seaward defences of Copenhagen and the frontal defence of the Danevirke.

In 1862 and 1863, the army's military exercises were carried out at the Danevirke, where they practised the offensive defence technique. The exercises were led by General de Meza, who for many years was the general commanding the 2nd High Command, which included Schleswig.

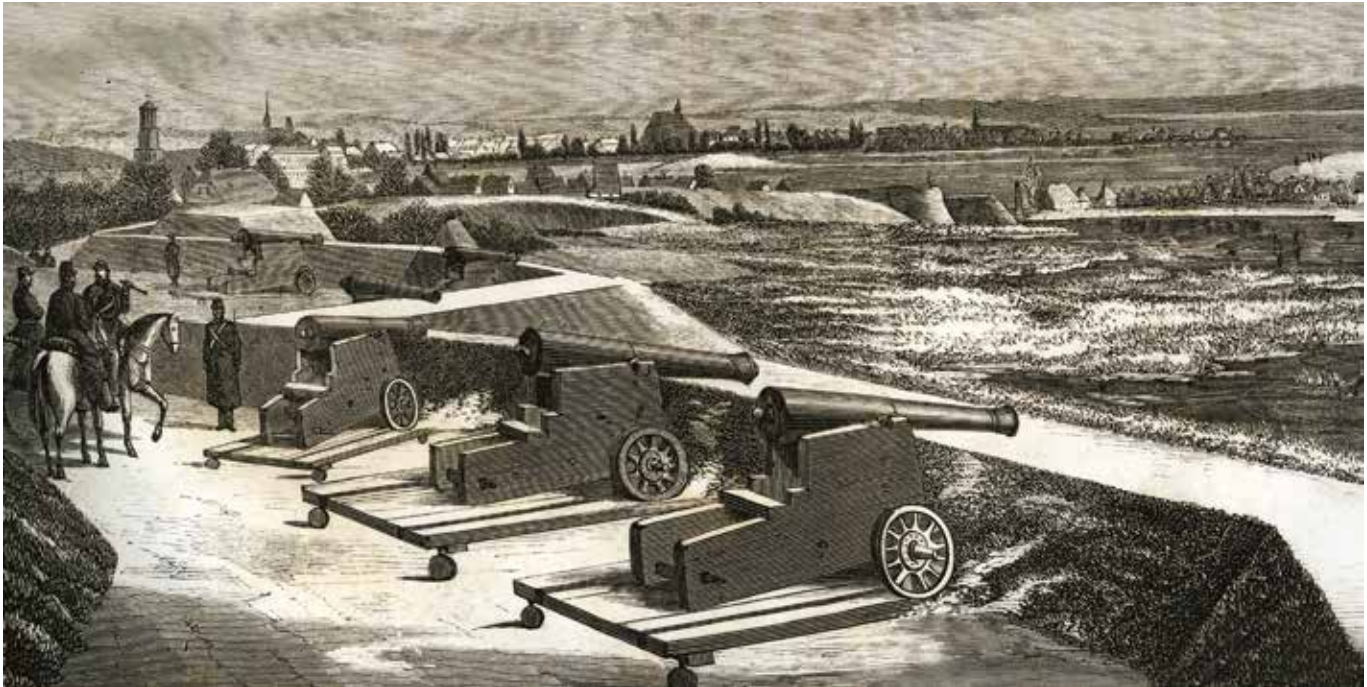


*The defence strategy comprised frontal defence at the Danevirke and flank defence at Dybbøl and Fredericia.*

## Sent reeling by the blow: the retreat from Danevirke

When Denmark began to make serious preparations for war in the last months of 1863, the problems that had plagued the armed forces since the First Schleswig War began to raise their ugly heads. The fact that tasks and areas of responsibility had not been clearly assigned either at the political or military levels meant that planning and preparations for the war left much to be desired.

At the end of December 1863, General de Meza was appointed Commander in Chief of the Danish army, then being mobilised to man the Danevirke fortification. In the course of January 1864, under extremely difficult conditions, the ramparts were extended and made ready for battle, and the army was put on a war footing. Progress was slow for the reasons already mentioned, and both the ramparts and the battle readiness of the troops

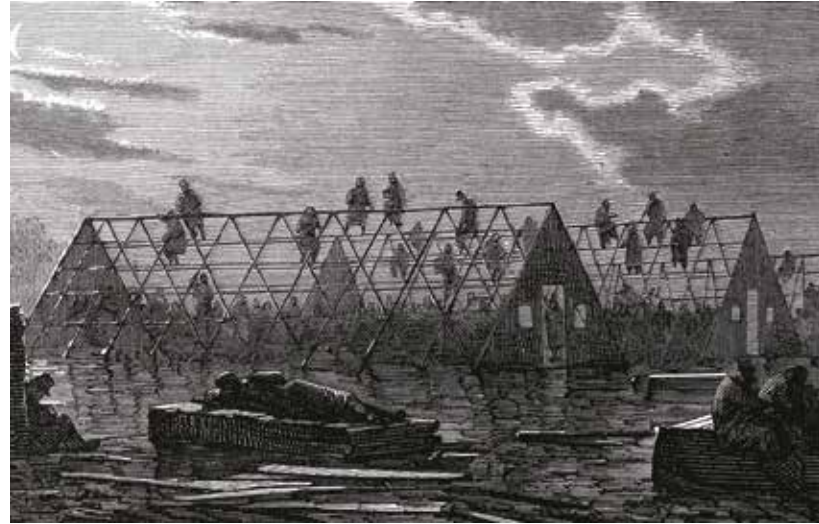


*Danish bastion just outside the town of Schleswig. The guns were in place, but there were hardly any billets for the troops.*

were woefully inadequate. Nationalist tensions within the Unified Monarchy, which had been completely ignored, now began to show: the troops of the Holstein units, whom the Danes did not trust, were not mobilised, and had to be replaced by older Danish reservists – a process that took a lot of time. Very soon, too, there were disciplinary problems in some of the Schleswig units, which included troops of both Danish and German affiliation.

The army, which was smaller than the frontal defence strategy required, was spread out along the whole of the Danevirke position. This meant that both the centre and the flanks were weakly defended, and – most serious of all – that the defence was without reserves. The end result was a passive defence of this major position, and not the offensive defence of the terrain in front of it which had earlier been practiced on exercises. In effect, the whole of the Danevirke position lost its defensive advantages: weakened when the winter cold made stretches of water no real obstacle to the enemy, it became very vulnerable to attacks on the flanks. All this meant that the army was on red alert, which, added to problems with billets and rations, and the severity of the winter weather, greatly eroded its readiness for battle.

General de Meza had been Chairman of the most important of the military commissions in the 1850s, which had given priority to frontal defence. Moreover, he had for many years been intimately acquainted with the Danevirke fortifications. Two of the most important conditions for a frontal defence – the number of men deployed and areas of water as a hindrance – were not fulfilled at the outbreak of the war. Despite this, de Meza never questioned the ability of the position to withstand an attack, nor did he prepare the War Ministry or the



*Danish soldiers perched for the night on the rafters of an unfinished barracks at Danevirke.*

government for the possibility that the Danevirke might have to be abandoned without a fight.

On 31 January, the supreme commander of the Prussian-Austrian army demanded in a note that the Danish army should withdraw from Schleswig, which De Meza categorically refused to do. On the following day, 1 February, the Prussian and Austrian troops crossed the border at the River Ejder and marched into Schleswig. The War had begun.

The Prussian-Austrian army advanced towards Danevirke, aiming to attack and defeat the Danish army on the flank for a quick and decisive ending to the war. Their plan was to pin down the Danish forces at Danevirke by confronting the centre, while at the same time attacking



*Danish soldiers at the ready behind Danevirke on the night between 2 and 3 February.*

the east flank at the Schlei, where by crossing the fjord they would be able to attack Danevirke from the North and thus defeat the Danes – or at least prevent them withdrawing to Dybbøl and Fredericia.

On 2 February, the Prussians attacked Mysunde, one of the crossing places over the Schlei on the south side of the fjord. The place was defended by a fortified bridgehead, and despite superior forces the Prussians were repulsed. On 3 February, however, the Austrians captured a number of important positions on the terrain in front of the Danevirke at Kongshøj. The Danes expected that the enemy would make a new attempt to cross the Schlei, and as there were no reserves to deploy, they now feared they would be pinned down in their positions and defeated. For all we know, a new Prussian attack might also have failed, and this would have had a major psychological effect on both sides, but there was a very real risk that a fresh attack would succeed, so the Danish army was in a very precarious position indeed.

On 4 February, the High Command summoned all available officers for a council of war, at which it was decided to withdraw from the Danevirke the following evening. None of the reasons for this retreat had been unfamiliar or unforeseeable before the outbreak of war, and yet there was now no alternative to abandoning the Danevirke and the whole frontal defence strategy. Retreat after just a few days' fighting reflects the lack of realism that had plagued both the planning of the defence strategy since the 1850s, and the actual preparations for the outbreak of war. Considerable effort had been expended in December and January to expand the Danevirke position and make it ready for battle. These efforts could have been better used at Dybbøl and Fredericia.

The government's standing orders for the defence of the Danevirke position stressed that it should not be prolonged so far as to compromise the subsequent defence of the flank positions. This was fully in accord with the defence strategy, but abandoning the Danevirke without defending the main defensive rampart complied neither with the letter nor the spirit of the standing orders.

The retreat took place on the night between the 5 and 6 February – an rather chaotic process that left the army totally exhausted. On 6 February, the Austrians caught up with the Danish rearguard at Sankelmark, a wooded area a few kilometres south of Flensburg. There was some heavy fighting before the Danes were able to repulse the attackers and secure the retreat.

The High Command had telegraphed to the King and the War Ministry that the retreat was under way, after which they broke off the connection, presumably to prevent receiving a counter order. When the news of the retreat from Danevirke reached Copenhagen, waves of

shock, anger and indignation swept through the population and the ranks of leading politicians. There were riots and violent demonstrations against the government and the royal family. Myth and reality collided with explosive

results; the affair spawned a political crisis which ended with the dismissal of General de Meza as commander in chief. The retreat from the Danevirke became a grim harbinger of the course of the war to follow.

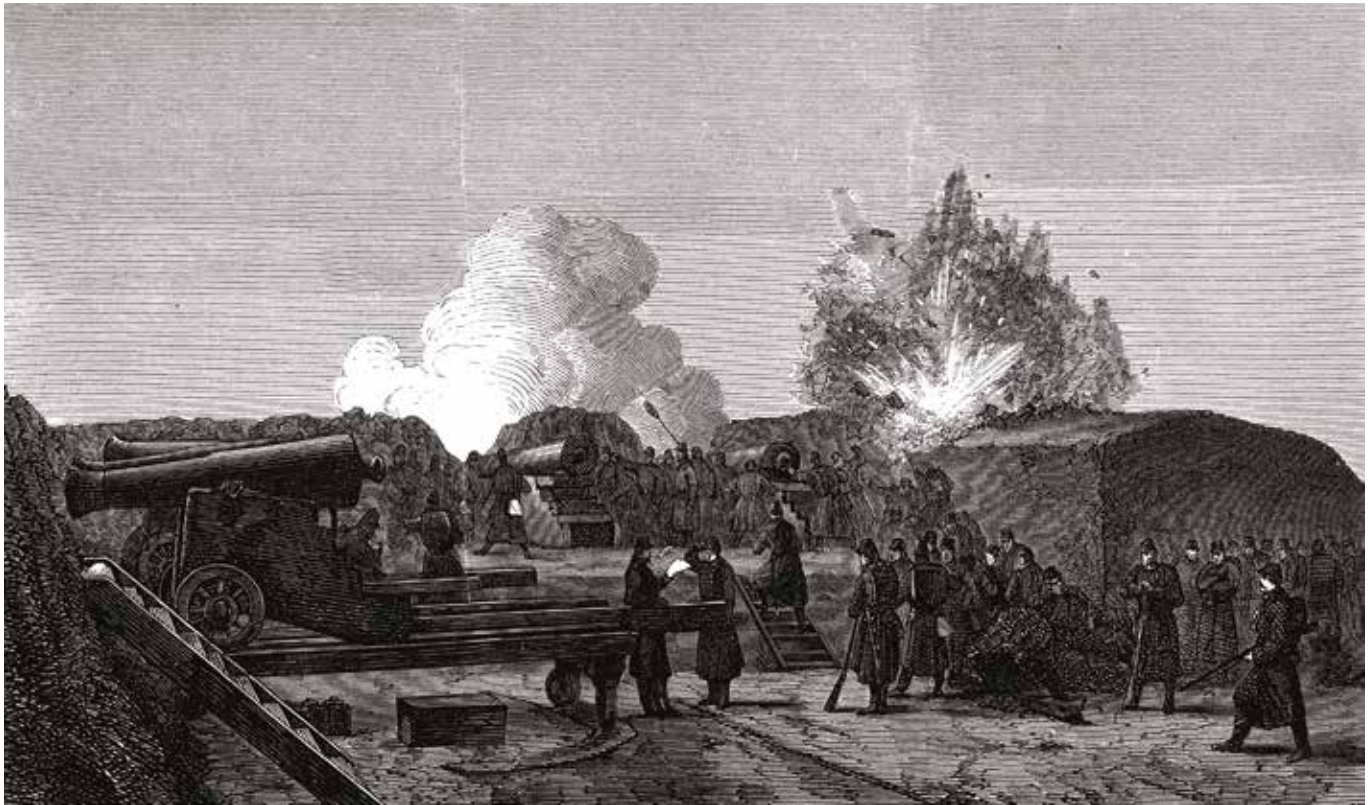


*The German troops were greeted with jubilation by the majority of the inhabitants of Schleswig on 6 February.*

## Beaten to your knees: the storming of Dybbøl

Having abandoned frontal defence, the strategy shifted to the defence of flank positions, seen as a good way of prolonging the land war and preventing the enemy pushing forward up the peninsula. The Danish army was split up, with units at Dybbøl, Fredericia and the border between Schleswig and the Kingdom of Denmark.

A section of the Prussian army advanced to close off the Dybbøl position. Another section consisting of Austrian and Prussian troops moved up towards the border at Kolding, but the advance was slow, as Prussia and Austria could not agree on whether the border of the Kingdom should be crossed in a war that fundamentally



*In one of the redoubts at Dybbøl during the bombardment from Broagerland. Only Redoubt 2 was able to return fire.*





*The fire in Sønderborg during the bombardment of 2-3 April, seen from the Dybbøl side. Of the 563 buildings in the town, 499 were damaged in varying degrees. Almost a third were burned to the ground.*

only concerned the Duchies. The Austrians especially were hesitant, and both states feared a reaction from the major powers, Russia, Great Britain and France.

However, when the Danish army unit in Kolding, the southernmost town in the Kingdom, suddenly withdrew from the town, a small Prussian force crossed the border and quickly occupied the town. As international reactions to this move were moderate, the Prussians and Austrians began cautiously to advance, with a view to cutting off Fredericia and forming a defence against Danish forces in northern Jutland. The fact that the Germans were able

to cross the border of the Kingdom unchecked by the Danish army was another example of bad communication, and the lack of a clear allocation of responsibility between the War Ministry, the army High Command and the commanders of major army units – a situation that characterised most of the war.

The Danish forces withdrew to a position near Vejle, where there was some fighting on 8 March. After this, the army began a retreat northwards through Jutland and lost touch with the German forces. Part of the flank position defence strategy was that the Danish army



*Sønderborg in ruins. At the end of the Square, the bombed-out Town Hall.*

should force the Germans to use their resources on preparing to repulse an attack from the North, thereby reducing pressure on the two flank positions. However, in this case the Danish army retreated so far to the North that the Prussian-Austrian force was able to consolidate its position on the southern part of the peninsula in the first weeks of March. It was thus in a position to cut off Fredericia, while providing a reserve unit for the Prussian force intent on encircling Dybbøl.

In the second half of March, both Dybbøl and Fredericia were so closely surrounded that it was impossible to launch sorties from these places, which meant that in reality the flank defence strategy had collapsed. Nor was there any sign of that international intervention which was one of the major goals of this strategy. Instead, Dyb-

bøl assumed the somewhat paradoxical role of a kind of second line frontal defence position: a political, symbolic defence of the mainland of Schleswig.

In the month of March, Prussian preparations for the attack on the Dybbøl fortification gained momentum. Batteries of heavy siege cannon were set up on Broagerland, from where they could bombard the southernmost Danish redoubts from the side. They began to shell these positions on 15 March. The next move was to place batteries of siege guns in front of the redoubts, which were thus soon being shot at head on.

The Prussian plan for the conquest of Dybbøl involved a flanking movement: pinning down the defenders by attacking the front of the emplacement, and crossing over to Als to attack the position from the rear. However, after several attempts to cross from Sundeved to Als had failed due to bad weather, this plan was finally abandoned on 3 April. The battle of Dybbøl thus became a classic siege operation, as the Prussian soldiers, under massive covering fire, systematically dug their way towards the position; and the closer they got, the more the Danes had to be on their guard and the more troop reinforcements were needed.

As part of their plans for crossing over to Als, the Prussians shelled Sønderborg, partly to hinder the movement of Danish troops over Alssund, and partly to muddy the waters as to their own intentions. The civilian population within the theatre of war was thus directly affected by hostilities, though not to the same extent as in modern warfare.

After abandoning their plan to cross over to Als, the Prussians greatly intensified their bombardment of the

Dybbøl position, and the damage soon became irreparable: the redoubts were quickly reduced to heaps of rubble, and losses multiplied alarmingly. The dangerous, stressful conditions in the redoubts and the supply trenches took a heavy toll on the men; in fact, the army was on the point of collapse and there was mutiny in the air.

In military terms, further defence of the position was pointless and would place the troops in great danger. The High Command therefore asked for permission to retreat from Dybbøl, but their request was refused by the government. The steadfast defence of Dybbøl was of great politi-

cal and symbolic significance for the government and the general public.

On the morning of 18 April, the bombardment reached a hitherto unseen intensity, then stopped suddenly at 10 o'clock. A moment later, thousands of Prussians stormed the southernmost Danish redoubts. Heavy fighting ensued, with considerable losses on both sides. Then the bombardment was quickly resumed, directed now at the area behind the redoubts to prevent Danish reinforcements from getting through. There were only a few guns in the shell-shattered redoubts serviceable enough to fire on the attackers, and there were not many soldiers in the



*The storming of Dybbøl 18 April, seen from the Prussian side.*



*Prussian officers on the battlefield inspecting the fallen, laid out according to nationality and rank.*

redoubts, as most of them were in the trenches outside, which offered better protection from the shelling. All in all, the badly-damaged redoubts could only offer a scanty defence, and they were quickly subdued.

The Prussian advance on the southern flank of the Dybbøl position was so fast that some of the Danish troops on its northern flank were in danger of getting cut off, so to protect their retreat, some of the reserves mounted a counter attack up towards Dybbøl Mill. This attack was carried out with great verve, but also with serious losses. By two o'clock in the afternoon, the last Danish soldier had retreated over Allsund. The Battle of Dybbøl was over.

The bombardment and the attack itself had caused large numbers of casualties. Especially serious for the Danes was the loss of so many experienced officers and non-commissioned officers.

#### **Losses sustained during the attack on Dybbøl, 18 April 1864**

The Danish army lost about 4,700 men, of whom 1,700 dead and wounded and 3,000 taken prisoner.

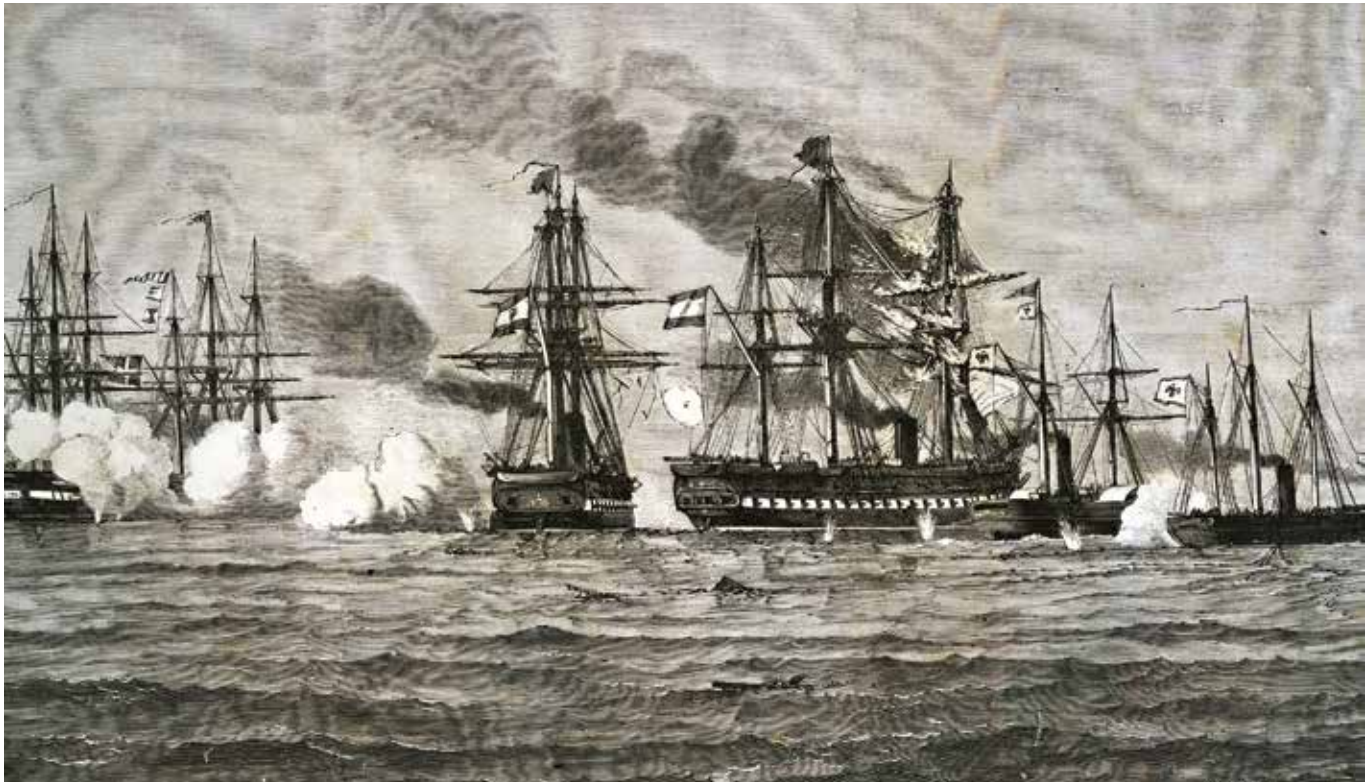
The Prussian army lost about 1,200 men dead and wounded, but none were taken prisoner.

There are no precise figures concerning the fallen.

# The Battle of Heligoland

In February, the Danish navy had been split into two squadrons, based respectively in the East Baltic and the West Baltic areas. As well as supporting the operations of the Danish army, the navy maintained an effective blockade of the small Prussian fleet and enforced a trade embargo on North German towns.

The naval blockade was a presupposition for gathering the Danish army in Schleswig, even though it meant leaving Zealand and Copenhagen unprotected, and it was maintained throughout the war. The only attempt to break the Danish blockade was made at Rügen on 17 March, when a small Prussian naval flotilla from North German har-



*The Battle of Heligoland, 9 May. On the left, the Danish frigates Jylland and Niels Juel, in the middle the Austrian frigates Radetzky and Schwarzenberg, on the right two Prussian gunboats Adler and Basilisk.*



*Crew of the frigate Niels Juel shortly after the Battle of Heligoland.*

bours engaged the Danish blockade squadron. There was a minor skirmish in which the Danish squadron quashed the attempt to run the blockade, an attempt which was not repeated.

The trade embargo had had some effect during the First Schleswig War, but now conditions were different and the effect of it very limited, not least because the Germans had expanded their railway network in the years between the wars.

On the other hand, naval support for the Danish land forces proved difficult to establish in practice, especially because of the lack of coordination between the army and navy.

The Danish defence strategy had only taken the Prussian fleet into consideration, but in the spring of 1864 a new threat appeared on the horizon – the Austrian fleet, which was superior to the Danish fleet. For the time being, the Austrian fleet was in the Adriatic, but in April a small naval force appeared in the shape of two Austrian frigates. They were joined by three small Prussian gunboats that had been in service in the Mediterranean.

The Danes kept a watchful eye on the Austrian ships, and a Danish squadron of two frigates and a corvette was sent to the North Sea to defeat the Austrian ships before they could be reinforced from the main navy.

On 9 May, the two squadrons met in the waters off Heligoland, and the engagement developed into a classic sea battle at relatively close range. When one of the Austrian ships was set on fire, the Austrian-Prussian force withdrew to neutral waters, and the battle was over. They later managed to reach a German port.

In Denmark, the Battle of Heligoland was regarded as a victory, but even though it boosted morale it did nothing to change the political or military situation. The advance party of the Austrian fleet had not been defeated, and it was uncertain how much time would elapse before the main fleet would appear.

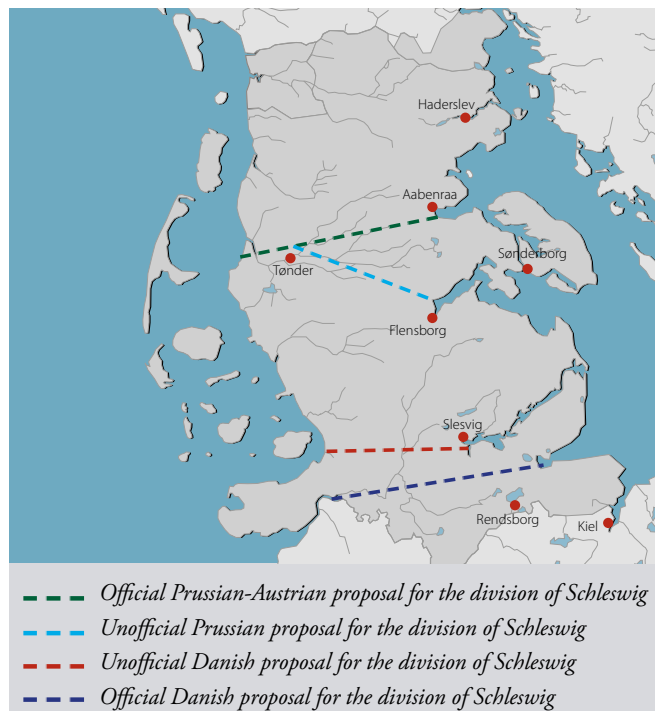
# The London Conference

On 20 April, an international peace conference opened in London. The participants were those major powers who had established the Unified Monarchy after the First Schleswig War: Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria, Prussia, and the German League, plus Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The aim of the Conference was to find a peaceful solution to the Schleswig conflict. As part of the negotiations, an armistice was declared from 12 May.

Everyone could see that a return to the Unified Monarchy as it was after the First Schleswig War was unrealistic, so the idea of a partition of Schleswig was at the very centre of the negotiations. Proposals in this connection had been put forward in 1848, and on several other occasions later, but for nationalist circles in Denmark the idea was unthinkable, and, in the wake of the 1848 revolutions, quite out of the question as far as the major European powers were concerned. Nor did the proposal gain much support on this occasion, despite the fact that both Great Britain and France went in for it.

The warring parties were poles apart: while the German side, bowing to pressure, went in for a proposal that in the main followed national divisions in Schleswig, the Danes called for a border much further south near the legendary Danevirke fortification. In the end, after much negotiation, Great Britain proposed a border which would lie between the German and Danish proposals, to be determined by arbitration, with some neutral power as arbitrator.

This proposal was rejected by the Danes after a meeting of the Privy Council on 20 June, when feelings ran high. At this meeting, Prime Minister Monrad left the decision on the hands of King Christian IX, this washing his hands of the responsibility of governing the country. The King found it impossible to entertain the idea of partition, and neither he nor the politicians dared fly in the face of vociferous public opinion. Once the Danes had rejected all proposals for a partition of Schleswig, the peace conference broke down. A few days later, on 26 June, the armistice ended, heralding the final stages of the war.



## Lamed and maimed: the crossing to Als

After the fall of Dybbøl, further defence of Jutland was in military terms pointless. The fortress at Fredericia was thus vacated at the end of April, and during the armistice the army began to gather troops on Funen, and to some extent on Zealand. Smaller forces were however left posted on Als and in northern Jutland. There was no military reason to defend either area, but the War was all about Schleswig, and as Als was the last major area of

Schleswig still in Danish hands it was decided to defend the island, though only a weak defence was offered.

In the night of 29 June, a few days after the armistice ended, the Prussians sailed over Alssund and landed on Als. Their goal was partly to capture this last part of Schleswig not in their possession and partly to inflict as many casualties on the Danish army as possible.

The attack was carried out by infantry in rowing boats, under massive covering fire from the Prussian batteries in Sundeved. The first wave sailed quickly across, and soon neutralised the first Danish line of defence. The Danish ironclad, Rolf Krake, was part of the defence of the island, and its gunfire forced the Prussians to stop the transfer of their troops. However, the ship had also received orders to cover the evacuation of Danish forces from Als, and so, considering this latter task more important, the ironclad sailed away out of the Alssund.

Heavy fighting ensued on Als, especially around the village of Kær, and the Danish troops were forced to withdraw to the southern part of the island, from where they were evacuated by ship to Funen and Zealand.

The Battle of Als resulted in serious losses, and once again the most serious blow was the loss of irreplaceable experienced senior officers and NCOs. After Als, the fighting capacity of the Danish army was effectively neutralised.



*Danish troops on Als during the period of the armistice.*

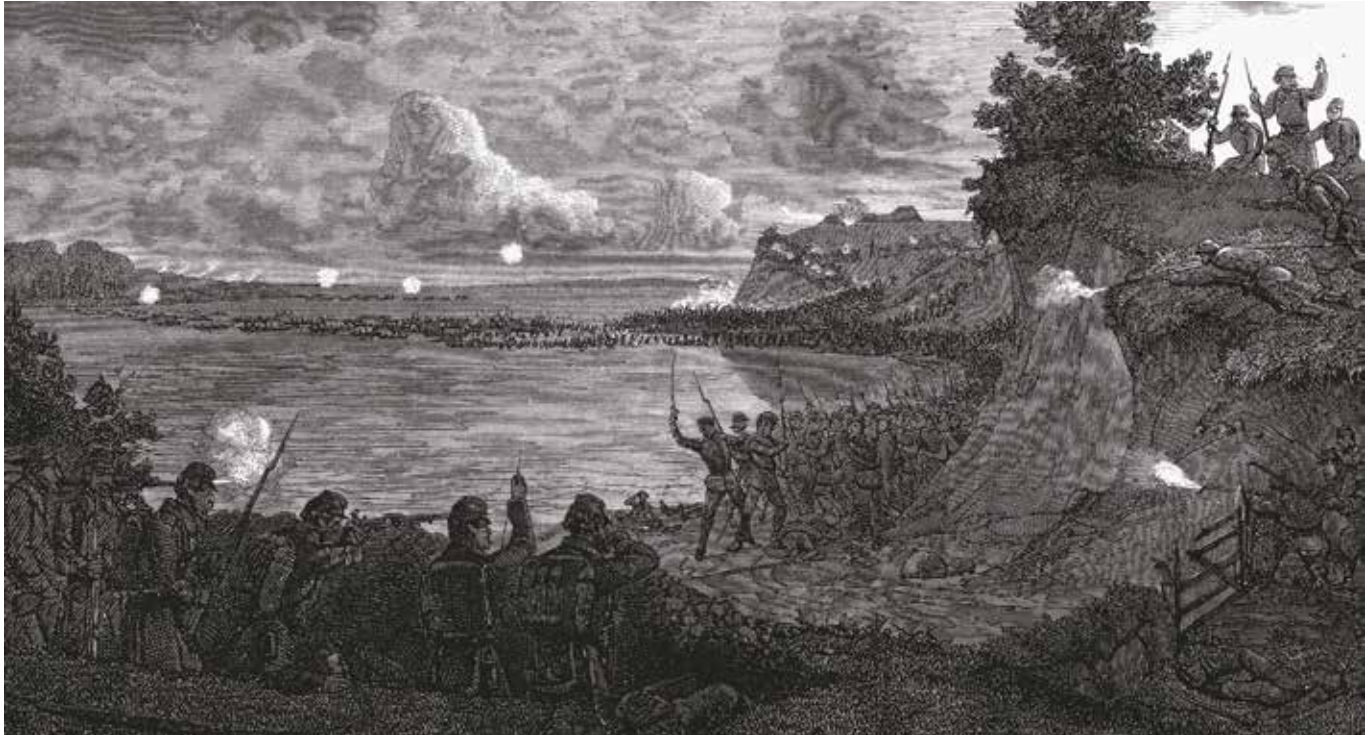


Shortly afterwards, the remaining Danish forces in Jutland were evacuated, and the rest of the peninsula was occupied by the German forces. The last engagement of the war took place at Lundby south of Aalborg on 3 July, where a Danish attack turned into a catastrophe for a variety of reasons, one of which was the fact that the Prussians were equipped with breech-loading rifles, the effectiveness of which was now demonstrated beyond doubt.

The loss of Als was a shock for the Danish public, which now realised that Funen and Zealand were now just as threatened as Jutland was. The nervous mood was further

heightened by the news that the Austrian fleet was approaching Danish waters.

In Copenhagen, the overheated mood of reckless nationalism was replaced by one of great fear, and everybody was clamouring for peace. On 8 July, the King dismissed the national liberal government, replacing it a few days later by a conservative government which was to negotiate peace with the Germans and the Austrians. A ceasefire was declared on 20 July. The fighting was over; negotiations about the conditions for peace could begin.



*The crossing to Als began on 29 June at 2 a.m. Numerous boats with Prussian troops can be seen out in Alsund.*

## Beaten to a pulp: the Treaty of Vienna

Unlike the London Conference, peace negotiations in the autumn of 1864 did not take place in a neutral country, but in Vienna, and they were based on the demands of Prussia and Austria. The other major powers left well alone, perhaps silently praying that a 'German'



*Four soldiers photographed in uniform before being sent home as war invalids.*

solution of the Schleswig problem would in the end be more satisfactory in terms of their own purposes than the 'Danish' one had been: quite simply, they wanted to see the Schleswig problem removed from the European agenda.

The peace treaty was signed on 30 October 1864. The conditions were simple and harsh: the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg were to be ceded to the victors. At one stroke, Denmark lost two-fifths of its area and one third of its population. In practice, however, the southern part of Schleswig as well as Holstein and Lauenburg had already been lost after 1848, as the population there felt no affinity with the Kingdom of Denmark. What really hurt was the loss of so many Danish-speaking people in North Schleswig. This was a bleeding sore that never healed.

With the Treaty of Vienna, the multinational Unified Monarchy became the Danish nation state, but there were many who gave this 'remainder state' little chance of survival. In the Lower Chamber of the Council of State, the Treaty of Vienna was approved with 75 votes for and 20 against. Those opposed feared that handing over the Duchies would be a sentence of death on Denmark, and they wanted to renew the war in a desperate struggle for existence. When the Treaty was ratified by Christian IX's Privy Council, he stated that he would rather have abdicated the throne.

## The Unified Danish Monarchy



**Area: 60,000 km<sup>2</sup>**  
**Population: 2,500,000**

## The Kingdom of Denmark



**Area: 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>**  
**Population: 1,600,000**

## War of paradoxes

Waging war calls for a strong State, but perhaps the same applies to avoiding one. In many ways, the War of 1864 was a war of paradoxes. The central paradox was that the Danish Unified Monarchy was restored after the First Schleswig War, even though the basic problems that had caused the war had not been solved. The restoration of the status quo ante was determined by the great powers within the framework of the European constellation of states laid down in 1815. The result was a weak Danish state, which to a large extent lacked popular legitimacy, especially in the Duchies.

It may seem paradoxical that in the 1860s the National Liberal government chose to revert to the 'To the Ejder' policy of the First Schleswig War, when it had been agreed with the major powers in 1851-1852 that this would not happen. The question is, though, to what extent this was a choice, or perhaps rather a situation in which there was no choice. The only alternative seems to have been a partition of Schleswig, a thought unthinkable in the trendsetting sections of the Danish population.

Just as paradoxical was the fact that the Danish government pursued a foreign policy that put them at odds with the rest of Europe, without carefully considering what chances Danish armed forces might have in a confrontation with the German states. Few doubted that it would end in war, but just as few had any clear idea of the weak state the armed forces were in. Many people lived in the overconfident glow of the First Schleswig

War and did not acknowledge the part played by the major powers in the reestablishment of the Danish monarchy in 1851.

The War itself was rich in paradoxes. Subsequent discussion about the conduct of the war has been largely influenced by the 'resigned to defeat' view of the war, proposed paradoxically enough by radical historians and officers writing historical accounts. This particular approach revolves round two central postulates: the 'wise' withdrawal from the Danevirke, and the 'unwise' defence of Dybbøl. There are good reasons to revise both these postulates.

The retreat from the Danevirke can be described as deeply paradoxical: since the beginning of the 1860s, far too large a chunk of the limited resources had been used on preparing a frontal defence here. The paradox lies in the disastrous lack of understanding between the political and military circles – between the national liberal government and the officer class, who were predominantly conservative and supporters of the Unified Monarchy. Senior officers would have had no understanding of the mystical power of this defensive wall, nor of the political and symbolic importance of a defence of Schleswig. Similarly, the national liberal politicians had no clue about the military shortcomings of the Danevirke.

The defence of Dybbøl is equally paradoxical in a number of ways. The criticism has often been made that the

defence of Dybbøl was continued even though there was no hope of success in military terms. In fact, though, the same criticism can be levelled at the War as a whole. In many ways, 1864 was a non-war, an endless succession of voluntary retreats: Danevirke, Kolding, Fredericia, and the long withdrawal up through Jutland. In this context, the defence of Dybbøl was an exception: after the war, the memory of valiance in battle and devotion to duty against all odds gave meaning in the lives of many, especially in Southern Jutland.

In Denmark there is a never-ending discussion about the significance of the Danish Resistance during the 1940-45 period of occupation, but it is undoubtedly more useful to look at the political and symbolic importance of resistance as such. The same is true of the War of 1864: one particular event has been endowed with special political and symbolic significance, both at the time and in posterity – an event that has stamped itself indelibly on the collective memory of the nation: the defence of Dybbøl.



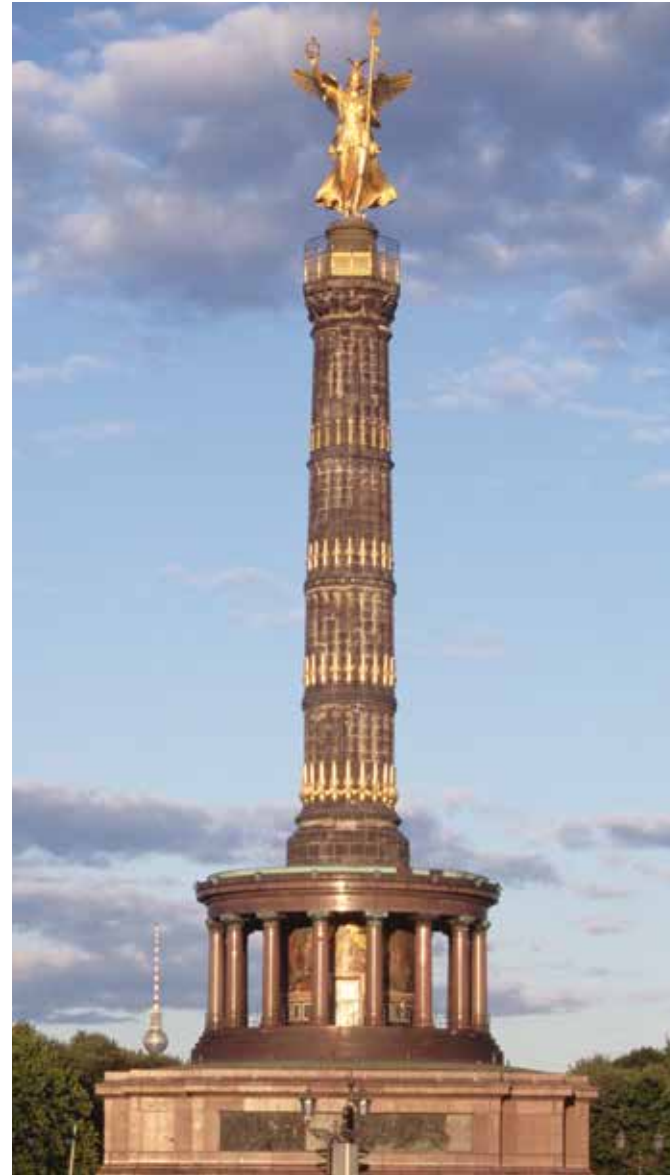
*Niels Simonsen: Infantrymen saving a cannon during the retreat from Danevirke. 1865.*

## Düppel, Königgrätz and Sedan

In the first year, the Duchies were jointly governed by Prussia and Austria, the victors in the War of 1864, but it soon came to a showdown between these two states, both of which aspired to lead a united Germany. Events led to war in 1866 – a war that only lasted a few weeks and which was decided by a Prussian victory at Königgrätz in July 1866. Austria was forced to hand over its rights concerning the Duchies to Prussia; the peace agreement (Peace of Prague) contains Article V (see p. 29).

Prussia now achieved a dominant position among the German states, whilst Austria was completely excluded. At the same time, there was increasing tension between Prussia and France. In 1870, this erupted in the Franco-Prussian War, which ended with a crushing defeat of the French at the Battle of Sedan in September 1870. The peace treaty was signed in January 1871, after which the German Imperial Reich was proclaimed at the Palace of Versailles.

After the three short wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870-1871, the many German states were gathered together in one Empire under the leadership, as Kaiser, of the King of Prussia and with its capital in Berlin. These events were commemorated by various memorials, including the Victory Column (*Siegessäule*) in Berlin, and in slogans such as this one from a German school textbook in 1914: 'Ohne Düppel kein Königgrätz, ohne Königgrätz kein Sedan, ohne Sedan kein Deutsches Kaiserreich'. ['Without Dybbøl, no Königgrätz! Without Königgrätz, no Sedan! Without Sedan, no German Empire!'].



*Siegessäule in Berlin, erected in 1873 to commemorate the three wars that helped unite Germany. It is topped by Victoria, Goddess of war.*

## The lost land

The Schleswig regional identity, felt by many people, soon disappeared. Unequivocal national affiliation replaced regional affiliation: people were either Danish-minded or German-minded, not just from Schleswig.

In the peace treaty signed by Prussia and Austria in 1866, French influence led to the inclusion of a clause stating that the northern districts of Schleswig could be ceded to Denmark if a majority of the population so wished: the much-quoted Article V. This promise enabled the Danish movement in Schleswig to accept the idea of the partition of Schleswig and offered some hope of a brighter future. Even though this part of Article V was rescinded by Prussia and Austria in 1878, it lingered on in Danish-minded circles in Schleswig as a legal claim.

In 1867, Schleswig became part of Prussia. The introduction of Prussian three-year military service was extremely unpopular in North Schleswig, which was predominantly Danish-minded, and many men chose to emigrate in order to avoid being called up.

According to the peace treaty of 1864, people were allowed until 1870 to opt for Danish citizenship while still resident in Schleswig. About 25,000 people (the 'optanters') made this choice, but they were forced to keep a very low profile in nationalist and political matters to avoid expulsion. Their children were not German citizens, but stateless.

In order to promote the Germanisation of North Schleswig, optanters were subjected to hard handed and arbitrary treatment. The problem was not solved until 1907, when the Optant Convention gave the stateless children of optanters the chance to achieve German citizenship and attendant civil rights, such as the right to vote. The Optant Convention strengthened Danishness in North Schleswig; in return, Denmark had to recognise the rescinding of Article V.

The first elections to the National Diet of the North German Confederation in 1867 revealed a clear Danish majority in North Schleswig and in Flensburg. The Danish majority in Flensburg disappeared in the 1880s, but remained in North Schleswig. After World War I, 75% of the population of North Schleswig voted in favour of incorporation into Denmark.

### **Southern Jutlanders in World War I**

As a result of the defeat of 1864, the inhabitants of Schleswig became German citizens. Some 30,000 men from North Schleswig (modern Southern Jutland) were called up to serve in World War I. Of these, 5,300 were killed and 4,000 wounded – losses that correspond more or less to the total Danish losses in the War of 1864.

## Lose externally, win internally

The War left deep furrows in the new nation state of Denmark: in foreign policy, domestic policy and the self-understanding of the nation. The National Assembly voted to set up a parliamentary commission to analyse the course of events and apportion blame. In the end, they did not act on this decision, which is one reason why in the ensuing decade people never tired of discussing interpretations of the War, and where responsibility for the miseries it caused might lie.

The loss of Schleswig and a large number of Danish-minded people in North Schleswig was a bitter blow, and many Danes hoped to recover Schleswig in alliance with France. However, the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 removed Denmark's only possible ally. The Danish response was a new defensive strategy, which concentrated the country's defences around a newly-fortified Copenhagen, considered by many to be the most important town in the centralised Danish state. The fortification of Copenhagen took place between 1885 and 1894, and from the start the project was a hot political potato. Many people regarded it as an expression of Danish revanchism, but even so the fortifications became the corner stone of Danish defence strategy until after World War I.

The War of 1864 helped to firmly plant the conviction that the German nation as such was aggressive and oppressive. The period up to 1914 was dominated by a self-assertive Danish nationalism, fed by the still waters of a pervasive cult of everything national. Common to

both these phenomena was the idea of a powerful, invincible German culture, waiting at the ready to gobble up all things Danish. For this reason, the government and public opinion were fully agreed not to enter into any treaties with the Germans, because this would allow them to interfere in internal Danish affairs. The question of North Schleswig was constantly in the public eye and led both consciously and unconsciously to the suppression of regional differences in the country. One of the consequences of the War of 1864 was a Denmark with its centre of gravity in Copenhagen.

In terms of domestic policy, the main issue was the constitutional crisis – a direct consequence of the War. There were two previous constitutions to be considered: the June Constitution of 1849, which only applied to the Kingdom; and the November Constitution of 1863, which also covered Schleswig, now no longer part of Denmark. These two constitutions had to be reduced to one, and so the debate about a new constitution began in the summer of 1864. The major question was whether or not free and equal suffrage (as understood at the time) should be preserved. Many conservatives were of the opinion that the main cause of the War had been a mistaken political system; that the liberal 1849 constitution had made it possible for the opinions of irresponsible citizens to force a spineless government to choose a catastrophic course of action. A long and bitter constitutional struggle began with the introduction of the amended constitution of 1866, which ensured that there would always be a conservative majority in the Upper House.



When in 1872 the Liberal Party of Denmark gained a majority in the Lower House, the struggle became a deadlock which was not resolved until the new system introduced in 1901, which ensured that the party with a majority in the Lower House would form a government. The real breakthrough for popular democracy came with the Constitution of 1915, which guaranteed equal suffrage to both the Upper and Lower Houses.

Despite the tremendous expense of the War, the economic consequences of it were soon compensated for, and by 1865 Danish bonds were worth just as much as in 1863. Financially, therefore, the end of the Unified Monarchy heralded a new period of growth in Denmark, but also a much greater degree of centralisation. Previously, Danish companies had found it hard to compete with the more advanced industries of the Duchies, but these were now subject to customs and dues. At the beginning of the 1870s, Danish foreign trade had reached the same level as that of the whole Unified Monarchy in 1860.

The connection between Copenhagen and Jutland was improved with the expansion of the railway network, and at the same time the influence of Hamburg on the Danish economy was greatly reduced. In 1868, a new port was built in Esbjerg, much boosting the export of agricultural products to England. Previously, all telegraph connections to Denmark had passed through Hamburg. The founding of the Great Northern Telegraph Company now ensured that a large chunk of the northern European telegraph traffic passed through Denmark. The company, moreover, went global.

To a large extent, Denmark's territorial losses were compensated for. The cultivation of heathlands had been going on for decades, but after 1864 it became a popular

cause. By 1914, such large areas of the Jutland heath had been cultivated that the total area of Denmark devoted to agriculture had grown by about 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> – an area corresponding to North Schleswig.

There were two presuppositions for these positive developments: general economic growth, and a population with the will to survive and the conviction that it was all worth it. Various popular movements had a major breakthrough in Denmark in the last third of the 19th century. There are several contributory causes of the development of institutions that completely altered the character of the Danish people: Folk High Schools, the cooperative movement, rifle and gymnastics clubs, planting associations, cultivation of the heathlands, the labour movement, reading clubs and the women's movement. Some of these were started before 1864, others not until the 1870s, but together they inspired the popular self-organisation that became so important a part of Danish culture.



*Port of Esbjerg 1874.*

## The War in art

Before the age of photography, historical painting was regarded as one of the finest genres in art, and as these paintings were sometimes official historical narratives, a certain tendency to pontificate and glorify was unavoidable. There are many paintings from the First Schleswig War (1848-1851) of battles regarded as resounding victories, but there are far fewer historical paintings from the Second Schleswig War (1864) – artists had difficulty finding inspiration in defeats.

*Illustreret Tidende* was first published in 1859 and was full of reading material and pictures. This Danish weekly reproduced several hundred woodcuts from the War, based on drawings by artists who had been at the front. These were the press photographs of the day, in that events could be depicted a few weeks after they had taken place.

One of the most famous historical paintings of the War was done as early as 1864-65 by Niels Simonsen. This is a greytone painting of infantrymen rescuing a



*Vilhelm Rosenstand: Counterthrust of the 8th Brigade. 1894.*

field gun during the retreat from Danevirke (p. 27). It became extremely popular, and numerous reproductions were printed. The Danish soldiers have laid a wounded comrade on top of the cannon. Simonsen also painted another greytone picture of this retreat, depicting the fighting at Sankelmark. The mood was one of hopelessness, and reproductions of this painting were therefore not to be found hanging in drawing rooms.

Jørgen Sonne, who like Simonsen had been a very prolific painter during the First Schleswig War, only painted one picture from the Second Schleswig War (see the front page). The motif is from Dybbøl at the beginning of April 1864. It shows the partly shattered redoubts with a fallen officer in the foreground and a constant rain of shells in the background. It reflects a hopeless situation and the futility of defence, which meant that it, too, never gained popularity.

In 1878, The National History Museum was opened at Frederiksborg Castle. The main idea of this museum was to provide a place for 'mementoes of the history of the Fatherland', to develop in people a sense of history and to bolster that self-confidence 'which a small people like us are so much in need of'. Historical paintings with an heroic touch, and monumental portraits of prominent officers were deemed to be the best way to do this. The actual historical events were now so far removed in time that the portrayal of courage and the defiance of death in the midst of an unavoidable defeat could become popular subjects. One obvious example of this is Vilhelm Rosenstand's 'Counterthrust of the 8th Brigade', painted in 1894, and still one of the most reproduced paintings of the War. It has become a fixed element in the heroic narrative about 1864, and has affected the way many generations have conceived of the storming of Dybbøl.



*Martin Bigum: National Retreat. 1996.*

Almost a hundred years later, in 1996, in the context of a more active, interventionist foreign policy, Martin Bigum painted a paraphrase of this motif in a work entitled 'National Retreat'. The motif displays the same contempt for death as in Rosenstand's painting, but there are absolutely no traces of heroism. It is an indirect comment on the official statement that Denmark, by participating in the Balkan Wars, had stepped out of 'the shadow of 1864'. The painting reflects the general narrative of defeat, which today is the dominant one, though not exclusive. Historical painting reflects a past event seen through the filter of a particular artistic temperament, and often includes a contemporary historical interpretation.

## The War in poetry

The War of 1864 only appears as a theme in a few novels, of which Herman Bang's *Tine*, published in 1889, is the best known. This novel presents the over-confidence in the Danish armed forces common in the middle classes, and the reaction to the seemingly heretical bulletin that the Danish army was retreating from Danevirke. It is in poetry, however, that the War has been described and interpreted. In these poems we meet different voices: in the year of the War itself we find both heartening ballads and hopeless, hateful lyrics; in the following decades, poems were written that helped raise the country from its knees and encourage the Southern Jutlanders to stand their ground.

Our Jens was not afraid, but faced with many a blade;  
rather than we should yield, drag us out by our heels...  
Your lifeblood you did spend, Dybbøl to defend.  
You stayed there in your pain, undying made your name;  
the loser often gains, that truth would they maintain  
each man, your countrymen, who know you fought so  
brave;  
your valour noised abroad, and praised by every nation.

*Wilhelm Rantzaau 1864*

Extinguished soon our final hope,  
low sinks our star to gloom;  
and Denmark sits as were she Job  
and picks her festering wounds;  
and friends will soon come herding round,  
as we our boils bemoan  
and comfort us with doleful sounds:  
'The fault is all your own!'

*Chr. Richardt 1864*

Axe to the root has now been laid  
of Denmark's hoary family tree.  
Our enemy's might the choice has made,  
where first the cut shall be:  
that Jutland branch whose shady head  
down to the Schlei and Treene did spread  
will now be thrown as faggots dead  
on roaring German stoves.

*Carl Ploug 1864*

Sent reeling by the blow  
beaten to your knees,  
lamed and maimed brought low  
old mother in your need;  
if your thoughts can wander  
past 'suffer and be meek',  
Oh Denmark show me yonder  
that future goal you seek ...

'Loved ones clad in armour,  
boys in shining mail,  
Valiant men stout-hearted,  
that is Denmark's goal...  
Schleswig's soil reconquered!  
Our struggle's final goal!'

*Fr. Paludan Müller 1864*

Oh Danes! Small lands must girded be,  
and tend their borders watchfully,  
both in the school and in the kirk,  
both in the North and in the South,  
with word of God, with Nation's mouth,  
build up the Danevirke work.

*N.F.S. Grundtvig 1868*

The hope we bear does not depend  
on great results and greater lies.  
On simple, naked Truth it thrives,  
and there it rests as with a friend.  
Of failure and defeat once born,  
in clash of arms then cleansed, reborn,  
its succour now is Denmark's need.

Never our trust in arms we place,  
in cannons nor in bayonets,  
in what the mighty may think best,  
nor in that we can win the race.  
Our hope is just that Denmark's lands,  
to where our language ends, may stand  
– frontier of an allied North.

*Mads Hansen 1870*

Yes, friends, a hard rain's been a-falling;  
it came storming and whipping through our wood.  
Germs of weeds blowing through our paling,  
yokes on necks, our lips are sealed for good.  
Each season has its fruit,  
sunlight shone on every root,  
too briefly, friends – the storm grabbed all the loot ...

And they thought that love's bonds can be broken,  
and they thought that our rights could be forgot.  
Well tell them, friends, our line will be unbroken,  
well tell them, friends, endurance is our lot.  
As long years have evolved,  
we have seen the bonds reformed:  
new hands born to serve for those expired.

*Johan Ottosen 1890*

Sons of the defeated  
you're standing on good land!  
Dead that disappointed,  
duped, unhappy band.  
Generously does Denmark's  
green and virgin soil  
open to embrace sound men  
who are prepared to toil.

Ever since Gorm the Old  
to present times we know  
that we have loved to gather  
... alas, defeat and blows!  
Let us now remember this,  
fists clenched in the air,  
and casting our gaze onwards  
to times more sweet and fair.

It sounds just like a fairy tale,  
a myth from days of old:  
A kidnapped daughter, grievely mourned,  
is safe back in the fold!  
Once but a dream in longing minds,  
no more will faint hope rankle:  
Come summer flies the Danebrog  
once more on Dybbøl Banke!

*Henrik Pontoppidan 1918*

A sundered people joined again  
by this, fate's wondrous hand.  
One the people, one the flame,  
one the joy throughout the land.  
Out of Winter burgeons Spring.  
Healed are all our wounds, we sing,  
closed is Denmark's gaping sore.  
Kongea, so sad and brave,  
once again through meads your waves,  
shall dance like days of yore.

*Helge Rode 1921*

Wiser grown from praying  
to a God who cannot hear,  
now we're opening, sharing,  
forgetting, wiping clear.  
Youth is born to action,  
not to serve tradition,  
not to cash in rubber cheques  
on a long-dead nation.

...  
Dead that disappointed,  
duped, unhappy band –  
sons of the defeated  
you're standing on good land!

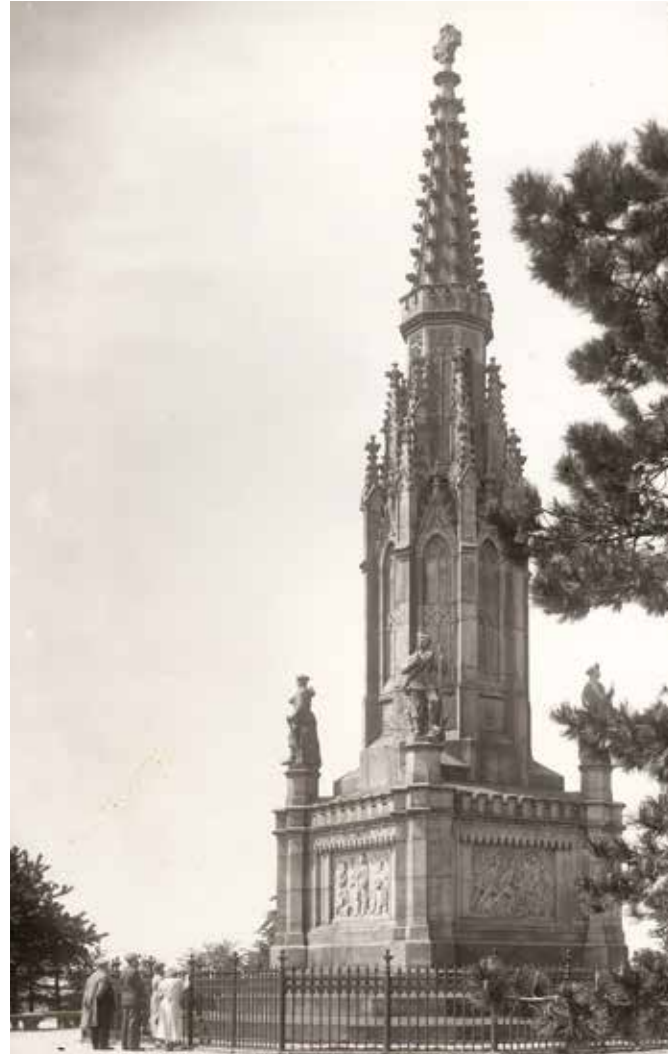
*Jobs. V. Jensen 1906*

## War memorials

It is more difficult to raise memorials to defeats than to victories, so for this reason there has never been a Danish memorial to the War of 1864, even though it was a decisive event in the history of the country. The Germans commemorated their victory by erecting two large victory memorials – at Dybbøl and on Als – which were inaugurated in 1872 after the founding of the German Empire. The victory here was seen as the first step on the road to uniting all the German states in one Reich – clearly expressed on the Siegestsäule in Berlin (p. 28), where there are reliefs showing scenes from three victorious wars, including the storming of Dybbøl.

The white windmill in the middle of the battlefield at Dybbøl became the Danish memorial to the battle. It had been shot to pieces during the siege. The rebuilding of the mill and the declared Danish sympathies of the miller and his family helped make it a symbol of the resilience of the Southern Jutlanders and their loyalty to Denmark. The population in both North and South Schleswig set up memorials on the many war graves in various cemeteries, as well as in the open landscape, for example, at Bøffelkobbøl.

In Copenhagen, there are monuments from the First Schleswig War to four generals and two Ministers of War, whereas the Second Schleswig War is almost invisible in the urban landscape. The only significant memorial from 1864 is the bust of Rear Admiral Suenson, who led the Danish ships at the Battle of Heligoland – a battle interpreted as a Danish victory. On the other hand,



*Battlefield tourists at the Düppel Denkmal. Abt. 1910.*

memorial plaques to fallen soldiers of the parish were set up in village churches all over Denmark, with the fallen from the two Schleswig Wars represented equally. By 1914, the reality of the war was so distant in memory that a pompous war memorial was erected at Lundby south of Aalborg, where the last and most unfortunate engagement of the War of 1864 had taken place.

The efforts of other ranks in the Danish army were not rewarded with memorials or medals for bravery. They had to go into action under very difficult conditions. When the War was over, most regiments chose to let soldiers return to their garrisons by the back door and under cover of darkness, to avoid the mockery of the population. Pensions for the relatives of those killed and for the invalids were very modest, and in general the veterans were not held in the same high regard as their predecessors had been. Not until 1877 were veterans of the war – after filling in the right forms – eligible for a bronze medal in recognition of their services.

On reunification in 1920, many Danes felt the need to do something about the cultural landscape around Dybbøl Banke and on Als, where there were many German memorial stones and monuments. The Danes therefore took the initiative to erect 110 memorial stones bearing the names of 140 Danish soldiers killed in the War, though only three of these were other ranks. After the liberation in 1945, the two large German victory columns were blown up by persons unknown, and a number of other German memorials were defaced.



*Visiting the battlefield in the 1930s.*

There have been several suggestions over the years about a common Danish-German memorial to the War of 1864, but such proposals have met with considerable resistance in Danish circles.

# The War as a place of remembrance

The concept 'place of remembrance' can be used in a literal and in an abstract sense: it can be a place, ceremony, event or date to which interpretations of the past are



*The Chairman of the Danish minority in South Schleswig lays a wreath at the German war memorial at Sankelmark, accompanied by the German Chairman of the Stammkomitee von 1864. 2011.*

attached. Places of remembrance often pass on historical information, or the way in which national communities are understood. It is not just a question of *what* is being remembered, but also of *why* and *how* it is commemorated and *who* is actively involved in doing so. The Schleswig Wars have given rise to a number of places and official days of remembrance.

In Denmark, the War of 1864 has been commemorated for the past 150 years, with annual memorial ceremonies and other rituals and anniversary events every 25 years – though only in a very modest way in 1939. That the War of 1864 has been enshrined in this culture of remembrance is especially due to the fact that until 2001, it was the last war in Denmark as such played an active part. The country was neutral during World War I and in World War II the Danish government capitulated after but a few hours of fighting. In this way, the War of 1864 has for many people become a symbol of readiness to defend Fatherland and People when an enemy is at the gates.

This understanding of the War is expressed by the laying of wreaths and various ceremonies on the dates and at the localities that mark bloody battles in 1864: 6 February at Sankelmark, 22 February at Bøffelkobbøl, 18 April at Dybbøl Banke and Garnisons Kirkegård in Copenhagen, 9 May at Holmens Kirkegård in Copenhagen, 29 June at the crossing to Als, and finally on 3 July at Lundby, south of Aalborg. The Germans also commemorate 6 February and 18 April.



Since February 1865, an annual memorial march has been held from Flensburg to Sankelmark (German: Oeversee). This was patriotic German celebration of their victory over the Danes and was organised by the 'Stammkomitee von 1864'. After the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955 (p. 43), the official speeches at this event took on a more conciliatory tone, see p. 38. Further, in 1963, the organisers expressed the wish that the march be organised to include both Germans and Danes. This idea was sharply rejected by the Danes, and only became a reality 40 years later. There was an official Danish delegation in 2003, and since 2004 Sankelmark Day has been a combined German-Danish event. Songs and speeches underline the spirit of cooperation in the border region, despite differences of national identity.

The battlefield at Dybbøl Banke is a place of remembrance for both Danes and Germans. At official ceremonies from 1865 right up to 2001, on 18 April each nation would lay wreaths and flowers at their own memorials and soldiers' graves, ignoring in silence those of their opponents. Until 1914, this ceremony was organised by the Prussian army, and after 1920 by the Danish army. Previously, the Danish memorial ceremony was markedly patriotic, but in 2002 the Germans were invited to take part and now wreaths are laid on all soldiers' graves. As at Sankelmark, speeches stress cooperative efforts in the border region. After the ceremonies, Danish and German troops march together down from Dybbøl Banke and through the town of Sønderborg. In the evening, there are two Danish events: a memorial service in the Sankt Marie Kirke and a festive commemorative event with music and song at Sønderborg Barracks, attended by 400-500 people every year.

These radical changes to the culture of remembrance for the War of 1864 demonstrate how places of remembrance can be reinterpreted and endowed with a new significance possibly far removed from the actual event being commemorated. In all cases, present needs determine which selected aspects of the past are to be focused on.



*A Danish and a German soldier lay a wreath together at the common graves at Dybbøl Banke. 2005.*

# The War of myths

There are many good reasons to call the War of 1864 ‘The War of Myths’. In Danish the word ‘myte’ (‘myth’) has two very different meanings: in one sense it refers to something demonstrably false that many people believe in anyway; in the other sense it means a narrative carrying values that contribute to shaping a community of remembrance. Both kinds of myth are attached to the War of 1864, and they often overlap. After the defeat, the value-bearing myths played a special role in restoring the mental balance of the nation, and have even found their way into the history books.

## Denmark lost the war because of muzzle-loading rifles

Perhaps the most familiar myth is that Denmark lost the war because its soldiers were equipped with muzzle-

loading rifles, whereas the Prussians had breech-loaders. This is simply not true. The Danish soldiers, like the Austrians, were indeed armed with muzzle-loading rifles, which had to be loaded standing. The Prussians, on the other hand, were equipped with modern breech-loading rifles, which, although they were less accurate, could be loaded lying down and fired much faster. The point is, however, that the superiority of breech-loading weapons was not recognised until after the War, not even by the Germans, and that in fact hand firearms played no major part in the hostilities; the decisive difference in terms of equipment was not rifles, but artillery. Before the Dybbøl position was stormed 18 April it had already almost been reduced to rubble by the Prussian long-range, breech-loading rifled cannons. Only one of the Danish redoubts had weapons that could reply to this constant shelling. In the end, the absolutely decisive difference was the fact that as major powers, Prussia and Austria were able to mobilise far greater military resources than Denmark could.

## Southern Jutland has always been Danish

Perhaps the most telling myth is that Schleswig (Southern Jutland) was and always has been an indisputably Danish area. This is not true. Southern Jutland was originally part of the Kingdom of Denmark, but was separated from it as a Duchy about the year 1200. In the course of the 14th century, the Duchy changed its name to Schleswig, but the term ‘Southern Jutland’ did not come into use until the 19th century. From 1375, Schleswig was part of a personal union with Holstein, and in 1460



*Danish soldiers in front of the ancient earthworks at Danevirke. In the background on the left, one of the new redoubts. This picture from January 1864 links ancient and modern times.*

the Danish King was chosen to be Prince of the Land over both territories, so that to a large extent they gradually became the same political unit, which was administered in German, despite being part of ‘The Kingdoms and Domains of the Danish King’. In the middle of the 19th century, Schleswig, in terms of nationality, was a mixture of Danish and German speakers, but language and identity are not always co-extensive, and most of the people of Schleswig saw themselves as neither Danish nor German, but simply as ‘Schleswigers’.

### **The Danevirke as the shield of ‘Danishness’ since ancient times**

The myth that the ancient Danevirke earthworks has been the shield of ‘Danishness’ since the dawn of time is widespread, but this is not the case. From the early Middle Ages, the earthworks served neither as a defensive fortification nor as a border of the Kingdom, which ran much further south – from 1460 down to the southern border of Holstein on the River Elbe. At the beginning of the 19th century, with nationalism much in vogue, the Danevirke rapidly became a symbol of Danishness and a cultural bulwark to the South. This idea contributed to the reactivation of the Danevirke as a defensive position, even though it had not been used for 600 years. During the First Schleswig War (1848-1851), the Danevirke was used as a defensive position with redoubts and gun emplacements, and in 1861, major construction work was begun to expand it. The fusion of history and nationalist myths endowed the Danevirke with mystical power, and the fortification was accorded a significance quite incommensurate with its military value. The retreat from Danevirke in 1864 came as a shock to many, but gradually evolved into the myth of the valiant General de Meza, who rescued his men from the ‘death trap’

of the Danevirke, into which they had been forced by despicable politicians. However, this myth is based on a very selective interpretation of the long chain of events leading to the evacuation, and of the part played by de Meza in all this.

### **Dybbøl as Denmark’s Thermopylae**

The comparison between the defence of Dybbøl and the defence of Thermopylae in Greece in 480 BCE was made as early as the summer of 1864, and became one of the myths of the War. At Thermopylae, the Spartan-led Greek alliance defended a vital mountain pass, but were surrounded by a much superior Persian force and fell fighting to the last man. The idea of Dybbøl as the Danish Thermopylae was further nourished in 1878, when Holger Drachmann published a travel book: *Derovre fra Grænsen. Strejftog over det danske Thermopylae* (From Over the Frontier There. An Excursion into the Danish Thermopylae). However, the myth of Danish soldiers as the Spartans of old indicates in simplified form a heroism which is by no means the whole picture. The Prussian soldiers quickly came so close to the Dybbøl position that it was easy to desert to the enemy – which quite a number of soldiers, in particular the Schleswigers, actually did. Under the violent bombardment in the month of April a mood of despondency spread among the Danish defenders, and on 15 April some were close to mutiny. Energetic efforts by some officers prevented this, but the officers were very worried that it might happen again. The defenders fought with great vigour when the enemy stormed Dybbøl, but they were crushed by weight of numbers, and the position was overrun in less than four hours. Taken overall, the performance of the Danish forces must be regarded as ambivalent.

## Peaceful co-existence in the border region

Today, a Danish-German conflict about Schleswig is unthinkable. The old conflict was resolved in two steps in the course of the 20th century: it started with partition of the area, something that had already been discussed in 1848. After World War I, Europe was radically changed along the lines of 'the right of nations to self-determination', as proposed by President Woodrow Wilson of the

USA. A number of internationally controlled plebiscites were held in areas of Germany with mixed populations. In North Schleswig (Zone 1), the voting was 75% for Denmark, 25% for Germany. In Flensburg and Mid-Schleswig (Zone 2), the figures were 80% for Germany and 20% for Denmark. In both plebiscite zones the electoral turnout was more than 90%.



*Map of the plebiscite Zones in 1920. In Zone 1 (North Schleswig), 75% voted to join Denmark. In Zone 2 (Flensburg and Mid-Schleswig), 80% voted to stay German. The present Danish-German border was determined on the basis of these clear results.*

In accordance with the results of the plebiscites, North Schleswig became part of Denmark and the Danish-German border moved about 70 km further south. The right of self-determination, however, did not lead to a border completely based on nationality. National minorities were left behind on both sides, a fact that strained Danish-German relationships for decades. After 1920, the German government wanted to make a bilateral agreement about these minorities, but Denmark refused, fearing German interference in internal Danish affairs – memories of German interference in Schleswig affairs from 1848 to 1864 were still very much alive.

Despite the partition of Schleswig, tensions continued to exist between Denmark and Germany. The German minority in North Schleswig did not recognise the 1920 border, and continued until 1945 to demand a revision. Correspondingly, the Danish minority in South Schleswig called for a revision of the borders after 1945, when its numbers increased considerably after the collapse of Germany. However, the Danish Prime Minister had already made his position clear in his opening speech to Parliament on 9 May 1945: 'This government,

firmly holding the right of nations to self-determination, takes the view that the southern border of Denmark remains fixed'. The government maintained this position in the face of the ethnic turmoil in South Schleswig and demands made across the political spectrum in Denmark that the border should be moved.

By 1954, the debate about moving the border had just about died down, but there were still problems: the Danish minority in South Schleswig was struggling to get exemption from the 5% threshold for elections to the State Diet, as well as for grants to their own schools and church activities; the German minority in North Schleswig (now called Southern Jutland) wanted their schools to have the right to hold public exams. The Cold War created a need for the Federal Republic of Germany to become a member of NATO, which opened an opportunity to make a Danish-German arrangement for the minorities. At a meeting of the NATO Council of Ministers in the autumn of 1954, the Danish Foreign Minister, H.C. Hansen, presented the problems facing the Danish minority, and the German government immediately entered into negotiations to discuss the matter. The Danes rejected a bilateral treaty, still afraid of German interference in internal Danish affairs. Instead, another solution was found, new in international law: two unilateral but almost identical government declarations, expressing the will to secure rights and privileges for the minority in each state and paying tribute to the peaceful co-existence of minority and majority populations. They also unequivocally laid down that the State would respect the free right of the individual to choose his or her national affiliation.

The two Declarations were made public at a meeting in Bonn on 29 March 1955 in the presence of Chancellor

Konrad Adenauer, and were subsequently endorsed by the Danish Folketing and the German Bundestag. The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations were an expression of vision and courage. Formally speaking, they were not reciprocally binding, but soon became so in practice.

Politicians began to speak about minorities in a different way, firstly as citizens with equal rights and then as an enrichment of society as a whole. This might almost sound like a magic formula, but in the long run the rhetoric helped change the mental climate in the border region. Reality did not always live up to the fine speeches, and on both sides of the border there was criticism of subsidies to minority organisations, but as support for the social and cultural work of the minorities gradually became depoliticised, most of the problems disappeared.

Today, both national minorities have recognised the border and have dropped any claims for a revision – which means that they are not making territorial claims on their neighbour's land. With this, more than a hundred years of conflict between Germany and Denmark have been brought to an end.



*Logo for the 50th anniversary of the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations.*

# Museums, battlefields, bibliography

## Museums:

Tøjhusmuseet, Tøjhusgade 3, 1220 København K  
Orlogsmuseet, Overgaden oven Vandet 58, 1415 København K  
Museum Sønderjylland – Sønderborg Slot, Sønderbro 1,  
6400 Sønderborg  
Dybbøl Mølle, Dybbøl Banke 7, 6400 Sønderborg  
Historiecenter Dybbøl Banke, Dybbøl Banke 16,  
6400 Sønderborg  
Danevirke Museum, Ochsenweg 5, D- 24867 Dannewerk,  
Tyskland  
Fregatten Jylland, S.A. Jensens Vej 2, 8400 Ebeltoft  
Lundby Museum, Bygaden 1, 9260 Gistrup

## Battlefields:

Description of all the places where the War of 1864 was fought:  
Sørensen, Erik Ingemann: *1864. En guide i krigens fodspor*.  
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The most important places showing evidence from the War:  
Mysunde, Königshügel (Kongshøj) southeast of Schleswig  
town; the reconstructed Redoubt 14 at Danevirke; Sankelmark  
/ Oeversee, south of Flensburg; Dybbøl Redoubts, Dybbøl  
Banke; the Arnkil Peninsula on Als; Fredericia Ramparts; Lund-  
by, south of Aalborg.

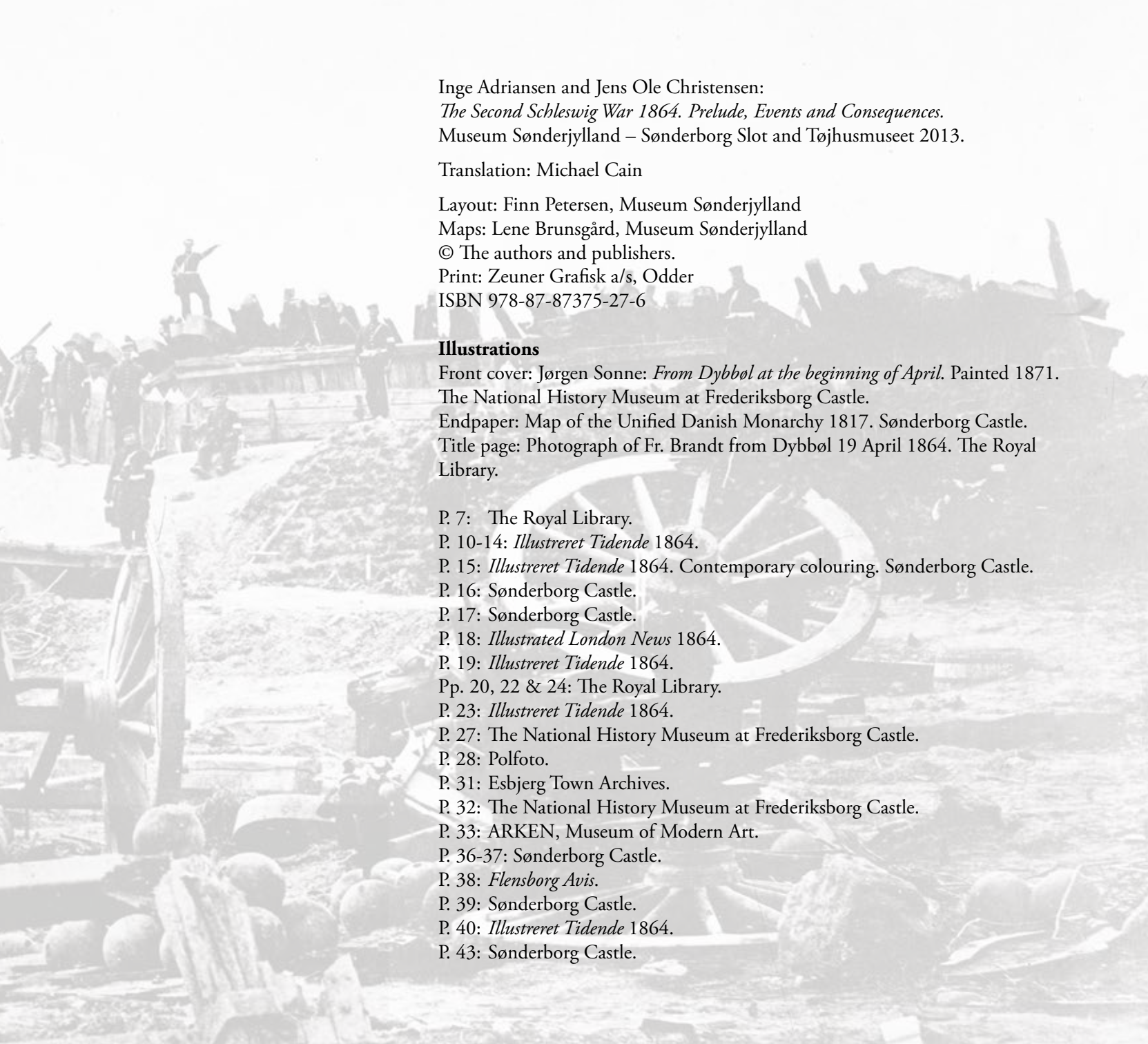
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Inge Adriansen and Jens Ole Christensen:  
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### Illustrations

Front cover: Jørgen Sonne: *From Dybbøl at the beginning of April*. Painted 1871. The National History Museum at Frederiksborg Castle.  
Endpaper: Map of the Unified Danish Monarchy 1817. Sønderborg Castle.  
Title page: Photograph of Fr. Brandt from Dybbøl 19 April 1864. The Royal Library.

P. 7: The Royal Library.  
P. 10-14: *Illustreret Tidende* 1864.  
P. 15: *Illustreret Tidende* 1864. Contemporary colouring. Sønderborg Castle.  
P. 16: Sønderborg Castle.  
P. 17: Sønderborg Castle.  
P. 18: *Illustrated London News* 1864.  
P. 19: *Illustreret Tidende* 1864.  
Pp. 20, 22 & 24: The Royal Library.  
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P. 43: Sønderborg Castle.

MUSEUM  
SØNDER  
JYLLAND

SØNDERBORG SLOT  
OG HISTORIECENTER  
DYBBØL BANKE

[www.museum-sonderjylland.dk/sonderborg](http://www.museum-sonderjylland.dk/sonderborg)  
[www.museum-sonderjylland.dk/dybbol-banke](http://www.museum-sonderjylland.dk/dybbol-banke)



[www.tojhusmuseet.dk](http://www.tojhusmuseet.dk)  
[www.orlogsmuseet.dk](http://www.orlogsmuseet.dk)

The Second Schleswig War 1864 offers a reader-friendly overview of the prelude to the war, the events of the war itself, and its wide-ranging, long-lasting consequences. In brief, the book provides background knowledge and important insights concerning a war that has marked the history of Denmark to the present day.

