

**STRATEGY
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**GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS:
FATHER OF COMBINED ARMS WARFARE**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Gustavus Adolphus: Father of Combined Arms Warfare

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ABSTRACT

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Today's military leader when asked, who was the greatest "Captain of Military History" would probably reply with the likes of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Frederick, or Napoleon. These captains, while leading their exceptional armies, provided significant innovations in operational and strategic art that are still practiced today. Although these contributions are noteworthy, their changes were evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. Truly the most prolific revolutionary but least well known "Captain of Military History" was Gustavus Adolphus, "The Father of Combined Arms Warfare." A skilled and conscientious monarch, he created the grand army of Sweden which in the early 1630s during the Thirty Years' War, saved Germany from becoming a Catholic state under the auspices of the Emperor Ferdinand of Hapsburg. Gustavus' innovations and improvements in the use of field artillery, redesigned battle formations, streamlined logistics, use of cavalry as a shock weapon and improvements to musketry highlight the importance of his contributions to today's warfighter. This strategic research paper outlines in detail those innovations in warfare that are now part of the Army's fighting doctrine.

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GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS: FATHER OF COMBINED ARMS WARFARE

Today's military leader when asked, who was the greatest "Captain of Military History" would probably reply with the likes of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Frederick, or Napoleon. These captains, while leading their exceptional armies, provided significant innovations in the operational and strategic art that are still practiced today. Although these contributions are noteworthy, their changes were evolutionary, rather than revolutionary.¹

Truly the most prolific revolutionary but least well known "Captain of Military History" was Gustavus Adolphus, "The Father of Combined Arms Warfare." A skilled and conscientious monarch, he created the grand army of Sweden which in the early 1630s during the Thirty Years' War, saved Germany from becoming a Catholic state under the auspices of the Emperor Ferdinand of Hapsburg.² Under Gustavus' rule, Sweden controlled an Empire that included Finland, much of the south shore of the Baltic Sea, and important possessions in Germany. These possessions were won by Gustavus on the battlefield through his improvements in shock action and firepower, battlefield formation redesign, introduction of soldiers' code of conduct, and streamlined logistics, to name a few.

Gustavus Adolphus was born in Stockholm on 19 December 1594, the eldest son of Charles IX, King of Sweden (1604 – 1611). His grandfather, Gustavus Vasa (1523 – 1560), was credited with introducing Protestantism to Sweden and civilizing what was a barbarous country. In fact, due to his reign, and continued influence after his death, Swedish aristocracy at the end of the sixteenth century was considered the most cultivated and refined in the Scandinavian and Baltic States.³ Gustavus' early years were quite remarkable as the young prince quickly demonstrated exceptional intellect. His eagerness to learn and his penchant for languages, sciences, military art, and classic literature gave him a solid foundation at an early age in the affairs of the state. His father, understanding his son's exceptional abilities, continually provided him the opportunity to attend the Ruling Council and give audience to foreign ambassadors. The King even allowed him at times, at the early age of ten, to reply on behalf of the Crown of Sweden on most affairs of state.⁴ Fortunately for Sweden, this real-world schooling provided Gustavus the right tools to become its greatest ruler and one of this millenium's masters of operational and strategic design.

Upon his father's death in 1611, at the age of seventeen, young Gustavus Adolphus ascended the throne and quickly became of age.

With the crown, he inherited three persistent conflicts with Denmark, Poland and Russia. He quickly took the field, and with skillful tactical command and careful strategic judgements, he was able to obtain reasonable treaties with Denmark (Treaty of Knared in 1613) and Russia (Treaty of Stolbovo in 1617). He then focused on a more serious challenge – King Sigismund III of Poland.⁵

During all of these campaigns, Gustavus experimented and continued to reform the poorly equipped and poorly organized Swedish army into what would become the preeminent military power of the day. Additionally, by securing the aforementioned treaties,⁶ he protected the territorial defense of the "Fatherland" which subsequently enabled him to commit to his main objective, the defeat of the House of Hapsburg and the survival of the Protestant cause during the Thirty Years' War.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Gustavus Adolphus' childhood education provided the foundation for his eventual succession to the Swedish throne at the early age of seventeen. Schooled by both his parents and tutors, it was soon evident that he had a keen intellect and a voracious appetite for learning the arts, especially literature, science, and languages. At age twelve, he was able to speak German just as well as his native language. He quickly became fluent in Latin, Italian, and Dutch which was uncommon for one so young. He was constantly debating fellow nobles and at times when allowed by his father, Charles IX, debated visiting dignitaries and heads of state.

... young Gustavus enjoyed a solid, affectionate relationship with a father who provided solid training in the uncertain crafts of Kingship. The crown prince combined supervised study of the leading classical and contemporary military and political theorists with heavy doses of practical experiences.⁷

These early experiences helped him develop a forceful, clear, and spellbinding speaking style that would later make him the best orator in Sweden and an inspiring military leader.⁸

Although very attentive and interested in the scholarly studies presented him, Gustavus was especially attracted to everything related to military affairs. Stories of his propensity towards warfare even as a child provide insights into what would be his true character as King.

...when he was five years old, his father took him down to Kalmar to see a fleet which was preparing to pay a visit of observation to the Hanseatic city of Lubeck, which had threatened to behave unpleasantly to Sweden. "Which of the ships does your Highness like best?" said an officer of distinction to the boy. "That one."-"Why?"-"Because she has more guns on board than the others."⁹...

The development and employment of guns would become the focus of his trade and future military successes.

Gustavus was strong and healthy and always excelled in things related to military training. He became extremely knowledgeable on all types of weapons and was an accomplished rider as well. He developed at this early age, an absolute contempt for danger, which would eventually bring about his untimely death at age thirty-seven. As Gustavus' education continued, he began to study every book he could find on military tactics and strategy. His first true military hero was Maurice of Nassau, the great Dutch soldier who was leading the Netherlands to independence from Spain.¹⁰ During the early 1600s, many European soldiers no longer fighting in the Dutch-Spanish War would come to Sweden to offer their

services to the Swedish Crown. Young Gustavus would sit for hours listening to the stories of the war, and about the military innovations of his hero, Maurice. Most of these soldiers were dutifully impressed by the military shrewdness of the young prince and his penetrating and thought provoking questions. This intellectual exchange in a few years hence, would serve Gustavus well as the newly crowned Swedish monarch and in his future conduct of warfare and his ability to enlist the aid of experienced soldiers.¹¹ So passionate for war, that in 1610, he was bitterly disappointed when his father did not allow him to accompany a corps of Swedish soldiers¹² to Russia to battle rebellious nobles supported by his cousin King Sigismund of Poland.¹³ During the entire Russian campaign, Gustavus fervently read all reports from the front; not missing anything that was sent his way. Although initial Swedish successes were achieved, the sizable Polish army was able to march on to Moscow and literally seize control of its affairs. While Russia was coming under Polish control, King Charles IX was stricken with a severe illness. These two events coupled with the invasion of Sweden by Christian IV of Denmark, led to Gustavus' first taste of battle. In April of 1611, Gustavus was duly knighted and sent to collect troops to fight for the relief of Kalmar, then the most important Swedish port, from the invading armies of Christian. He quickly recaptured the isle of Öland. He also was successful in the destruction of the town of Christianopol (Kristianstad today) by outfitting his soldiers in his enemy's traditional clothing – his first use of deception as a combat multiplier.

On October 30, 1611, Charles IX died and Gustavus ascended the throne. However, in accordance with Swedish law, Gustavus could not become King until the age of twenty-four. Two months after the death of Charles, due to his demonstrated maturity, wisdom, exceptional intelligence, and outstanding military skills, the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) quickly changed the law of accession, and proclaimed Gustavus II Adolphus, King of Sweden.¹⁴ His first act was to appoint Axel Oxenstierna, a trusted advisor and friend, as Prime Minister. This was one of the most important decisions the young king would have to make. Oxenstierna served the young king well, allowing him to lead his armies while he attended the affairs of state. Although Sweden itself appeared to be on track internally, Swedish foreign affairs were not. Charles IX left his son three unfinished wars with Denmark, Poland, and Russia. If Sweden was to become a truly great power then these disputes would have to be settled so that Sweden could gain control over all the Baltic. Gustavus knew he could not simultaneously engage all three countries. Therefore, he decided that the most serious threat to Sweden was Denmark.

MILITARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DENMARK

Gustavus inherited this conflict from his father and had already fought in some of its battles. As stated earlier, the Danish King had invaded lower Sweden during the turmoil caused by Sweden's military expedition to Russia and Charles IX's, untimely illness and death. The Danes were in control of two important fortresses at Kalmar and Alvsborg, and were confident that they could continue their successes

against the newly crowned king. Gustavus again proved them wrong. For he did not fight his army as one would suspect. What he did was attack the Danes in their own territory instead of conducting the usual long and difficult siege operations against the two fortresses.

This bold strategy of a counterblow, instead of local defense against the enemy's invasion, was unprecedented in those days, and was worrisome to his advisors. Nevertheless, Gustavus advanced through the Danish province of Scania toward the town of Helsingborg.¹⁵

This was a perfectly sound strategy although in practice it did not work as the Swedish army was surprised by an unexpected Danish attack and forced to withdraw. Undiscouraged, Gustavus quickly reorganized his troops and implemented the same strategy as he attacked the Danes in Norway. While this operation was ongoing, Christian also prepared to conduct a seaborne operation against Stockholm. With threats to his native homeland and the lack of a credible defense in and around Stockholm, Gustavus rapidly marched 1,200 men, 80 leagues (approximately 240 miles) in less than a week to meet the threat.¹⁶ Additionally, he hastily organized the local peasants and burghers, which gave him a large force to fight the Danes. Upon seeing Gustavus at the head of this sizeable yet untried force, Christian quickly withdrew his forces by ship back to Denmark. Neither side claimed any advantage during this campaign but a peace treaty was signed at Knared on January 19, 1613.

This first year of fighting gives us insights into what we will come to expect of Gustavus Adolphus as he continued with his military campaigning. Even at the age of seventeen, Gustavus was able to demonstrate the qualities of mind and character which distinguish great military leaders.¹⁷ Gustavus discerned that his initial strategy of attacking the enemy on his own soil failed only in that he did not provide adequate security of his rear area. He proved how inspiring and adept he would become at raising and training a partially equipped citizenry into an effective fighting force. Finally, the young king displayed great wisdom and practicality by conceding at such a high price¹⁸ Sweden's peace with Denmark, as it allowed freedom of action against his two remaining objectives, Russia and Poland.¹⁹

RUSSIA

Gustavus' campaign against Russia evolved slowly as his attention was diverted by his first true love interest, the beautiful Countess Ebba Brahe, and because of political maneuvering by the Russian nobles. Apparently, the nobles (or boyars as they were called) had become disenchanted with Sigismund's rule and wanted to offer the throne of Muscovy to Gustavus' younger brother, Charles Phillip. While Gustavus and his advisors slowly debated the offer, the Russians selected Michael Romanov instead. Gustavus' indecision was perhaps his greatest political blunder as hostilities were resumed.²⁰ In 1614, Gustavus sailed to Finland and took command of the army poised to fight the Muscovites. Sweden held strong positions along the Gulf of Finland and on Russian soil at Novgorod. In early 1615, Gustavus began his operations, marching from Finland to Ingria, a province on the northern Russia coast. He

quickly took the town of Gdov but was bogged down conducting a subsequent siege operation against a strong Russian fortress at Pskov. Gustavus wisely gave up and retreated to avoid the oncoming, harsh Russian winter. Although it appeared that Sweden did not accomplish much with this operation, both sides eventually sued for peace and on February 27, 1617, the treaty of Stolbova was signed. The treaty shut out Russia from the shores of the Baltic Sea and vastly improved Swedish control of those waters.²¹

During this campaign, Gustavus showed great insight into his character when he told his second in command, Count Jacob de la Gardie, that he should not hesitate to abandon the Swedish stronghold of Novgorod. "We set more store by you and your brave men, of whom we hope for further service to our fatherland, than by Great Novgorod."²² Although only twenty years old, Gustavus understood that armies were more important than strongholds, which today's warfighters sometime overlook. What also was established during this campaign was Gustavus' penchant for strict discipline. His army was not a marauding band of mercenaries that plundered and ravaged the countryside, which during this era was commonplace. On the contrary, his army obtained most of its stores and food by requisitioning from the local population. Plundering and mistreatment of civilians was punishable by death! This "civility" by the Swedish army was heretofore unknown and would serve Gustavus well in the future and reinforce his rapidly growing reputation across the European continent.

Gustavus returned to Sweden and for the next few years continued to establish internal reforms that solidified Sweden as a legitimate European power. His first change was the establishment of a centralized administration, which provided delegation of authority to those that remained behind during his frequent expeditions against other countries. He also reorganized the Treasury, which enabled him to better equip, train, and feed his armies. All in all, Gustavus' reign established higher standards of government, the rule of law, and educational advancement. All of which helped keep Sweden strong as he continued his successful execution of his military vision.²³

Gustavus also used this respite to build up and train his combat tested army. The lessons learned from the wars with Denmark and Russia had provided Gustavus several ideas to try to improve his army's organization, tactics, and equipment. Even as he continued to administer to the affairs of state, Gustavus focused most of his attention in 1618 to the development of new weapons, the designing of new equipment and new battle formations, and the integration of same into a cohesive fighting organization.

POLAND

Although a series of truces had kept Sweden and Poland relatively peaceful, war was renewed in 1621. War with Poland was not as easy as the two previous had been. Six campaigns would be waged against Poland before a treaty favorable to Sweden could be signed.²⁴ This war was to be Gustavus' first large-scale overseas expedition. He sailed from Sweden with nine regiments of foot soldiers and ten companies of cavalry amounting to 20,000 men. Poland at this time was also involved in major wars with

Russia and Turkey and therefore left its northern provinces virtually undefended. Since there was no credible Polish navy to oppose the armada, Gustavus landed on Polish soil unopposed and started his attack towards Riga. After six weeks of siege operations, Riga surrendered. Gustavus and his army continued operations in 1625 throughout northern Poland, gaining strategic footholds along major lines of communication. In 1626, Gustavus decided on a winter campaign against two Polish forces separated by intervening terrain and a distance of twenty miles. With a small force composed of cavalry and musketeers, he quickly engaged the larger Polish force and put the enemy to flight with minimal loss to his own forces.²⁵ In this small battle, Gustavus rapidly attacked the enemy before they could unite their forces. It also highlighted his use of rapid movement, shock tactics, and firepower to support maneuver. This action secured Livonia for the Swedes while the Poles were forced to retreat into Lithuania. There was not constant combat during all these years on Polish soil as numerous truces were enacted which gave Gustavus time to continue to refine some of his military innovations and conduct Swedish affairs of state.

In the summer of 1626, Gustavus embarked on yet another military expedition against Poland in East Prussia. Here Gustavus would battle Polish forces for the next three years and enhance those military innovations and principles of tactics with which he later would astonish the world in his campaigns in Germany during the Thirty Years' War. Poland finally realized late in 1626, that the Swedish King was testing their very survival as a great power.²⁶ Sigismund, realizing the gravity of the situation, named a highly professional and credible opponent, Alexander Koniecpolski, to counter the Swedish King. Gustavus would learn many things from his battles against Koniecpolski; he was unquestionably the most able opponent that he ever had to face. It was also during this time that Gustavus again needlessly risked his life leading his troops during several operations. Although repeatedly urged by advisors not to do so, Gustavus continually led from the front which made him immensely popular with his soldiers. They never failed to follow him wherever he led them.²⁷ After many long years of intermittent war, Sweden and Poland finally signed a six-year truce (Truce of Altmärk) on September 16, 1629, which more or less secured Gustavus' home base for future operations in Germany.

What slowly emerged from his prosecution of these wars with Denmark, Russia, and Poland was his strategic long-range vision. It became evident that Gustavus Adolphus had three interrelated objectives in his long-range strategy. First, Gustavus wanted complete domination of the Baltic Sea, to include all its littorals, which is why the wars with Denmark and Russia were prosecuted. Second, he wanted to dominate all aspects of Poland's commerce so that Sigismund would be forced to sue for peace and give up his claim to the Swedish crown. Third, Gustavus had already made up his mind to intervene in the religious war in Germany once he secured his country's economic and territorial possessions.²⁸

THE MAKINGS OF MODERN WAR

Already stated, Gustavus Adolphus provided the 17th century and centuries to come with innovations in military tactics and equipment while prosecuting wars and administering to affairs of state. In the beginning of the 17th century, the European standard infantry formation was based on the Spanish *battalia*, which consisted of two to three thousand infantrymen arrayed as pikemen or musketeers in battle lines of ten ranks. Pikemen were armed with a 15 to 18 foot-long pike and sword, with heavy body armor. The musketeers were armed with musket and sword and wore less armor. Muskets required a lengthy loading time and were fired from an awkward four-foot long rest planted in the ground.²⁹ Cavalry was heavily armored and would move en masse to attack formations with pistols and then would retire to reload. Artillery was so heavy to be almost immobile and very rarely supported the attack. Crews and gunners were hired to man the pieces which led to many disjointed operations. Additionally, there were no engineers, logistic support or other administrative personnel consistent with today's armies. "Battle array was always formed in opposite and parallel lines; there were no flank attacks; no reconnaissance before, or pursuit after the battle."³⁰ This was what confronted Adolphus Gustavus as he entered the world stage in the early 1600s.

Gustavus, understanding the need for change was the first to organize a *regular army* instead of just mercenaries. Using conscription, Gustavus was able to raise an army that was available for an entire war, not just a battle or campaign. He then proceeded to guess correctly that mobility and firepower were the keys to success on the battlefield. He decreased the number of lines in the infantry formation while increasing the number of musketeers and proportionally reducing the number of pikemen. He also shortened the pike, lightened the musket, which up to this point had become too cumbersome to fire and be of any overwhelming value. He did away with armor, except the helmet for the musketeer. To increase his rates of fire he replaced the matchlock with a more rapid firing wheel lock, abolished the "rest", reduced the number of loading motions, and introduced paper cartridges carried in pouch slings. Additionally, he introduced firing from the knee, which now allowed three ranks to fire simultaneously.³¹ He then arranged his musketeers and his reduced number of pikemen in lines no more than six deep. Several of these formations entered the battlefield with cavalry and artillery interspersed among the intervals. The cavalry or the formation itself afforded flank protection.³²

Cavalry's contribution to the battle Gustavus surmised, was not in firepower but in its shock effect. He formed them in ranks of three with the front rank firing pistols until just the right moment when all three ranks would draw swords and with shock action overwhelm the enemy.³³ The tasks of reconnaissance and pursuit were also part of the cavalry's battlefield tasks when required. Recognizing the utility of the heavy artillery guns for general supporting fires, Gustavus also ascertained the need for lighter weight artillery to support the maneuver force as it attacked enemy formations. These lighter guns were assigned to the regiments and hence the name (which is still used today) regimental artillery. These guns were light enough to follow the troops anywhere and could be loaded faster than the musket of the musketeers. Gustavus is thus recognized as the founder of the "field artillery" which he raised to the

dignity of the third arm.³⁴ As Gustavus trained his artillery, cavalry, and infantry to work closely together, he was laying the groundwork for what would become modern combined arms warfare. His blending of precise maneuver of battalions and squadrons coupled with unprecedented firepower, produced an amalgam of missile and shock tactics unknown in Europe since the Roman legions.³⁵

Great as the improvements were in the three combat arms, Gustavus' most significant contribution were those he made to the order of battle. With the right equipment and training, Gustavus' employment of these forces in battle provided the basis for much of modern military doctrine.

His regiments were merged into brigades on line (linear tactics) and integrated with cavalry and artillery (combined arms) to form self-sustaining combat groups which could also provide mutual support when acting in concert. The cavalry could be used to overrun the enemy infantry and artillery (shock action) or neutralize the opposing cavalry ("the best weapon against a tank is another tank"). The artillery would suppress the enemy supporting arms (gain fire superiority) while the infantry would advance firing by salvo (fire and maneuver) until near enough for the "push of the pike" (close combat).³⁶

Gustavus also introduced the concept of a reserve force. Not only did he employ an operational reserve but each infantry formation also created its own local reserve for use when needed.

Gustavus introduced other military innovations that indirectly supported the maneuver fight. As was stated earlier, he was the first to introduce regular discipline via his *Articles of War*. These articles were forty-five in number and referred to a myriad of offenses that each soldier swore not to commit.³⁷ Gustavus also established a highly organized and efficient supply system. Throughout the territories that he conquered, he maintained a series of strategically placed fortresses, which he continued to re-supply. A staff of commissaries handled distribution of all the stores. This reduced the normal heavy baggage trains and multitude of camp followers that encumbered his foes. Other Swedish practices introduced by Gustavus were: chaplains assigned to troops in the field conducting regular morning and evening worship; advancements via promotions based on merit and seniority, not nepotism; establishment of a corps of engineers; and an emphasis on fieldworks and bridging. Finally, the introduction of proper clothing and footwear enabled Gustavus' soldiers to remain ready in winter quarters while his enemies dispersed for shelter and sustenance.³⁸

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR

The three wars as stated earlier, had won for Gustavus the security he desired for the fatherland. It also provided a "battle lab" as Dodge noted:

In these campaigns Gustavus had observed the practical working of his new army organization, and learned a fondness of the then existing system of tactics and strategy. He was enabled to gauge the advantages of his own methods, which, in the short remaining term

of his life, he molded into what was the origin of the modern art of war...³⁹

Thus Gustavus had prepared and perfected a veteran army that was highly mobile, with unequaled firepower, steady in defense against surprise attacks and highly skilled in the orchestration of coordinated attack by its three combined arms. It was indeed an army far superior to any other of its time. Gustavus was now prepared to fight for his Protestant cause.⁴⁰

Gustavus, although fighting for the Protestant cause, had other motives for entering the Thirty Years' War in 1630. He knew that if Ferdinand, the Holy Roman Emperor, was successful in Germany, it would only be a matter of time before Protestant Sweden itself was attacked. Intervention in Germany also granted an opportunity to form a buffer of allies and clients for Sweden against the Poles and the Imperialist forces of Ferdinand.⁴¹ Additionally, he realized that if he was successful, new commerce markets would open and bring in more money to Swedish coffers. He also realized that the Baltic would really become a Swedish sea, as he would have control of all its shores.⁴² For Gustavus to gain the hegemony he sought, he needed to inflict upon the Imperial forces a substantial depletion of its power, both physically and (for more lasting results), psychologically. He recognized that the forces were the true strategic center of gravity of the Holy Roman Empire.⁴³ Knowing that a purely defensive posture would only benefit his enemy, he took to sea with a force of about 14,000 men in July 1630 and landed unopposed on northern German soil in Pomerania.⁴⁴

POMERANIAN CAMPAIGN

Gustavus' army although small, was highly trained in the new and improved combined arms warfare. What he planned to do once on German soil was to recruit a larger army from the Protestant Princes with whom he had made tentative alliances.⁴⁵ Gustavus was disappointed when he realized that no one would join his cause. Most princes professed their neutrality as they did not want to overtly challenge Ferdinand and the Hapsburg Dynasty nor did they want to join forces with whom some had called an interloper.⁴⁶

Up until 1631, Gustavus forces were uncontested as they spread out east and west gaining just most of Pomerania as well as footholds in Mecklenburg (west of Pomerania) and Brandenburg (just south). As winter drew near, Gustavus consolidated his forces during the month of January and prepared to resume operations. It was at this time that Cardinal Richelieu of France signed a treaty with Sweden pledging financial support to the cause.⁴⁷ The Treaty of Barwalde provided a French financial subsidy to Sweden and in return, Sweden agreed not to encroach on Bavaria nor deny the German Catholics the freedom of worship. Gustavus readily agreed to these terms as it fit his modus operandi of religious freedom for all.

Battlefield engagements up until the summer of 1631 were virtually nonexistent as Gustavus could not get the bulk of the Imperialist forces to commit to any major battle. In essence, the Swedish

King had won over the entire northern half of Germany except for a few isolated and besieged imperial garrisons. Gustavus, although strongly established in Pomerania and the lower Oder River, could not move any deeper into Germany as he still lacked allies among the Protestants.⁴⁸ The two he needed most were the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony, both of whom were vacillating, as they did not want to face the wrath of the Emperor if Gustavus was defeated.

Gustavus took the offensive hoping to force the Electors to his side. Both Electors gave Gustavus transit rights through their provinces. Although still wary of alignment with the Swedish cause, the Imperialist forces slaughter of the inhabitants of Magdeburg in May prompted the Protestant John George of Saxony to ally himself with Gustavus. The stage was now set. "After a summer of desultory maneuver, Gustavus finally forced the Hapsburg army under the elderly, pious Count Tilly to give battle at Breitenfield on 17 September."⁴⁹

BATTLE OF BREITENFIELD

The Imperial Army (40,000 strong) was arrayed in a single line of contiguous columns, infantry in the center and cavalry on the flanks. The right wing was composed of 6,000 horse, the left composed of 5,000 horse, with the center under Tilly, of thirteen to seventeen solid squares, each about 1,500 men strong. The artillery of 27 to 36 heavy guns was emplaced in front of the infantry.⁵⁰ Gustavus' forces (about 45,000 strong including the forces from Saxony) were drawn up in two lines, cavalry on the flanks, infantry in the center and a reserve in the rear. The right wing composed of 5,000 horse and the left wing composed of 2,800 horse. Of infantry, there were four brigades in the first line and three in the second. Each brigade was composed of 1,500 men. The twelve heavy guns of the artillery were arrayed in front of the left wing, while; forty-two light guns were dispersed among the infantry.⁵¹

The battle started as Tilly's artillery opened fire and Gustavus' guns returned the fire. This duel lasted about two hours. At the sound of the last gun, Tilly's cavalry attacked but were quickly repulsed by the accurate and lethal fire of Gustavus' musketeers. Meanwhile, at the outset, the Saxons in support of Gustavus' left flank, fled the field at the sight and sounds of the initial battle. However, due to the Swedes' inherent flexibility afforded by their extended order and the fire power of combined arms they were able to repulse all attacks made by the Imperial Army and outmaneuver the unwieldy Imperial infantry battle formations.⁵² While the Swedish artillery was neutralizing Tilly's guns, Gustavus personally led four regiments of cavalry that quickly overran the guns and broke the ranks of the Imperial army. Gustavus continued the pursuit killing and capturing a large percentage of the Imperial Army. At a cost of only 2,000 of his own men, Gustavus accounted for enormous Imperial losses and provided a battlefield seminar in the use of firepower and flexibility.⁵³

The losses of the German army were much larger and are less accurately known. They were probably not less than 7,000 killed and wounded, without counting the pursuit, perhaps one-fifth of the total. Of prisoners, 5,000 were taken into the Swedish service, and there

were presumably others as well. Besides this, many were dispersed. The army, in fact, was not only defeated but also destroyed, and Breitenfeld is among the most complete and decisive victories in history.⁵⁴

With this victory, Gustavus was able to achieve one of the purposes for which he had gone to war – a significant defeat of the Imperial Army.

DETERMINING STRATEGY

By the fall of 1631, Gustavus Adolphus dominated northern Germany, controlled the Baltic Sea, and had alliances with at least five Protestant Princes, to include Brandenburg and Saxony. Tilly and his devastated Imperial army had retreated deep into western Germany, leaving nothing to stop Gustavus' southerly approach.⁵⁵ The victory at Breitenfeld had gained Gustavus instant recognition throughout all of Europe. Most Protestants were now ready, willing, and able to pledge their allegiance to him in the fight against the Emperor. Although he dominated the Imperial Army at Breitenfeld, he knew that the Holy Roman Empire was big enough, rich enough, and resilient enough that this defeat was not enough to end the war. To press the Emperor to sue for peace, Gustavus had to also occupy the richest Imperial territories to deny the Emperor the resources he needed.⁵⁶ Gustavus was at a strategic crossroads and realized he needed to take advantage of the situation. He had several choices to contemplate. One - he could follow Tilly into western Germany and finish off the rest of the Imperial army; two – he could move into predominately Catholic southwestern Germany and establish control; or three – he could march southeast to capture Vienna, the heartland of Ferdinand and conclude peace.⁵⁷ Gustavus chose to continue the campaign into southern Germany to strike at the Rhineland. This action would not only provide him great material benefit, but would also provide him security by basing his army in the nearby Protestant province. In retrospect, Gustavus choice not to capture Vienna was probably a sound one. If he conducted that operation, he would have overextended his already fragile lines of communication. Additionally, there were no guarantees that his alliances with the Protestant Princes would remain intact.

SOUTHERN GERMANY CAMPAIGN

Gustavus continued to record successes as he marched across Germany. His reputation as well as his power base continued to grow. Although seemingly invincible at this point, Gustavus' campaign had two weaknesses. First, everything depended on his well being. There was no one with his ability or prestige to carry on his work. This worried his advisors as he was always frivolously risking his life. Second, Gustavus' forces were spread too thin throughout Germany as he could not sustain a large concentrated force and thus could become vulnerable.⁵⁸ However, there still were many Protestants and mercenary alike flocking to his cause as an idea of a Protestant federation under the Swedish king surfaced.⁵⁹ The thought of this ever happening spurred Ferdinand to quickly recall the only man he felt

could defeat the “Lion of the North” – Albrecht von Wallenstein.⁶⁰ Before he could raise a new army Gustavus caught the Imperial forces at the river Lech and soundly defeated them and mortally wounded Tilly. As Wallenstein took command, he and Gustavus played a game of cat and mouse as each leader tried to lure the other into premature battle. In June, Wallenstein positioned his forces around Nuremberg as Gustavus did the same. After several weeks of stalemate, the Swedes picked up and moved towards Vienna hoping to draw the Imperial army with them. Wallenstein did not bite and in a masterful strategic move, headed towards fainthearted Saxony.⁶¹ This not only threatened one of Gustavus’ weaker alliances but also threatened his lines of communication. His own plan ruined, “Gustavus turned his army north in one of the notable forced marches of any war, traveling 270 miles in eighteen days.”⁶²

THE BATTLE OF LUTZEN

The armies that met at Lutzen on November 6 counted about 19,000 men apiece. The Imperialists had learned something from past experience. Their tactical organizations were more flexible, their firepower greater, than at Breitenfield. The Swedish army for its part was worn from campaigning and casualties, its regiments not quite what they had been a year earlier. Add to that the fog that enveloped the field in the engagement’s crucial hours, and Lutzen’s results were in good part consequences of chance.⁶³

The Imperial army was formed in the usual way, cavalry on the flanks, infantry in the center, and artillery in support off on a flank. The Swedish army was arrayed similar to its disposition at Breitenfield with each of the four brigades of infantry being supported by at least five light guns. The attack started about noon, with Gustavus as usual leading the way out front. During the melee and subsequent fog of war, the Imperial army and Wallenstein were routed and driven from the field. The jubilation of victory however was over-shadowed by the death of the Warrior King, Gustavus Adolphus. During one of his many charges, he was shot from his horse and killed.

The death of Gustavus did not remove Sweden from the war. It did, however, remove the driving force behind the Protestant alliance. Sweden would continue to fight for its cause and gain enough territory to make it a formidable European power and secure its Baltic hegemony for several decades to come.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

Oxenstierna, Sweden’s Prime Minister summed up Gustavus’ impact on European and Swedish history when he wrote:

In the world is now none that is his equal, nor has there been for centuries such a one; and indeed I doubt whether the future will produce his peer. Yea, truly we may call him King Gustav the wise, the great, the father of the fatherland.⁶⁵

Gustavus Adolphus was indeed a brilliant general, excellent strategist and tactician, and an inspired innovator and organizer; he was also an intellectual and a gifted administrator,⁶⁶ truly a "Great Captain of Military History." His accomplishments on the battlefield are exceptional case studies in the art of early modern warfare. His role in leading the way for the Protestant cause during the Thirty Years' War saved Germany from becoming a Catholic state under the control of the Hapsburg Dynasty. His impact to military science can not be overlooked and is still evident within the military establishments of today.⁶⁷ His development of linear battle formations, combined arms warfare, establishment of supply and administrative functions, fire support, and shock action, to name a few, provide today's leader the requisite tools required to conduct successful offensive and defensive operations.

Gustavus Adolphus portrayed all the qualities needed to be a successful strategic leader. His ability to provide an adequate and proper vision enabled his soldiers to execute their missions with relative ease. His up front leading-the-way attitude is a outstanding example of what today's strategic leader must do to keep soldiers on track and to have them follow what ever orders are given. His exceptional leadership qualities of selection and training of highly capable subordinate commanders, is also a strategic trait one must have to succeed. Gustavus Adolphus is clearly the "Father of Combined Arms Warfare" and a true "Great Captain of Military History."

WORD COUNT: 6,325

ENDNOTES

¹Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, The Military Life of Gustavus Adolphus: Father of Modern Warfare (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), xv.

²Brian D. Moore, "Gustavus Adolphus," A paper submitted in partial requirement for History 635 at Old Dominion University (October 2, 1978), 1.

³Charles R. L. Fletcher, Gustavus Adolphus and the Struggle of Protestantism for Existence (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1890), 17.

⁴Ibid., 24.

⁵Franklin D. Margrotter, COL, Brassey's Encyclopedia of Military History and Biography (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 1994), 415.

⁶Eventually Gustavus was able to secure a workable treaty with Poland after nearly six years of war.

⁷Nils Ahnlund, Gustavus Adolphus the Great (New York: History Book Club, 1999), xv.

⁸Dupuy, 6.

⁹Fletcher, 24.

¹⁰Dupuy, 7.

¹¹Moore, 1.

¹²Led by Count Jacob De la Gardie - was one of Gustavus' early mentors in the art of warfare and would later become an outstanding Field Marshall in Gustavus' army. Charles IX agreed to send the corps in return for the ceding to Swedish control a disputed region on the Gulf of Finland.

¹³Already King of Poland, Sigismund was officially recognized in 1594 as the King of Sweden. While he remained in Poland, he left the administration of affairs for Sweden to his uncle, Charles IX. Since Poland was predominately Catholic and Sweden Protestant, it became apparent that Sigismund could not rule both. Therefore, in somewhat of a coup in 1604, Charles IX took over as King of Sweden laying the foundation and groundwork for Gustavus Adolphus.

¹⁴Dupuy, 11.

¹⁵Ibid., 13.

¹⁶Ibid., 14.

¹⁷Ibid., 15

¹⁸Gustavus wanted to quickly end the conflict. Therefore he agreed that Sweden would pay huge financial appropriations to Denmark in exchange for guarantees of no hostilities and freedom of movement within the Baltics.

¹⁹Ibid., 16.

²⁰Edward Noel, Gustaf Adolf: The Father of Modern War (London: Bale & Danielsson, 1905), 2.

²¹Dupuy, 17.

²²Noel, 3.

²³Anne Commire, editor and Deborah Klezmer, associate editor, Historic World Leaders 2: Europe A – K (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, Inc., 1994), 554-555.

²⁴Moore, 5.

²⁵Noel, 7.

²⁶Dupuy, 32

²⁷Ibid., 35.

²⁸Ibid., 30.

²⁹Noel, 21.

³⁰Ibid., 23.

³¹Ibid., 26-27.

³²R. Earnest Dupuy, and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History, 4th edition from 3500 B.C. to Present (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 575.

³³Moore, 2.

³⁴Noel, 28.

³⁵Russell F. Weigley, The Age of Battles (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991) 4.

³⁶Moore, 3.

³⁷Noel, 33-34.

³⁸Moore, 4.

³⁹Theodore Ayrault Dodge, Gustavus Adolphus (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), 140-141.

⁴⁰Dupuy, 67.

⁴¹Ahnlund, xix

⁴²Moore, 6.

⁴³Weigley, 18-19.

⁴⁴Ahnlund, xix

⁴⁵Dupuy, 70.

⁴⁶Moore, 6.

⁴⁷Noel, 40-41.

⁴⁸Dupuy, 83.

⁴⁹Moore, 7.

⁵⁰Noel, 50-51.

⁵¹Ibid., 52-53.

⁵²Moore, 7.

⁵³Ahnlund, xix.

⁵⁴Noel, 50.

⁵⁵Dupuy, 106.

⁵⁶Weigley, 25.

⁵⁷Ibid., 107.

⁵⁸Ibid., 116.

⁵⁹Moore, 8.

⁶⁰Albrecht von Wallenstein although a formidable opponent for Gustavus was summarily dismissed by Ferdinand in July 1630, soon after Sweden entered the Thirty Years' War, as a show of support for the Catholic League Princes. These German Princes wanted peace negotiations with the overly successful King of Sweden and wanted a restriction of Wallenstein's ever growing power. Ferdinand finally relented to the Princes and dismissed Wallenstein, as he needed the Princes' support for his son's succession to the Hapsburg throne.

⁶¹Moore, 9.

⁶²Ibid., 9.

⁶³Ahnlund, xx.

⁶⁴Ibid., xx.

⁶⁵Commire, 558.

⁶⁶Trevor N Dupuy, Curt Johnson, and David L. Bongard, The Harper Encyclopedia of Military Biography (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 304.

⁶⁷Moore, 10.

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