

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 84

“So Much the Better”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Germany had a bold plan for winning the Great War in weeks, not years, and the key element was a rapid and overwhelming advance into northern France through Belgium, which began on August 2.

The French military had an inkling of what the Germans were up to, although the full fury of the German offensive is not clear to them even now. French military planners had a response already prepared: a counteroffensive into Germany, ready to launch as early as the tenth day of mobilization, which would cut off any German offensive and retake the lands lost so bitterly in 1871.

But the French had underestimated German daring, and it almost led to the fall of France.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 84. So Much the Better.

Two weeks ago, we followed the initial German advance into Belgium. That the Germans might consider using Belgian territory to do an end run around the French fortifications at Verdun and Toul had been foreseen by the French. They thought they had an adequate answer to a German thrust through Belgium, and that's what we're going to talk about today. But before we get going with the war, I need to review some military terminology, so that I can put this into words properly, and so you can understand what I'm talking about.

Maybe I should have done this before I got into the war, but I felt that I had spent plenty of time on the preliminaries as it was, and anyway, as long as we were only talking about the invasion of Belgium, I felt I could safely skip it. But now that we are talking about very large formations, we need to develop a new vocabulary. I've touched on some of this before, and I'm sure some of you already know all this, but I hope you'll bear with me anyway, because, well, it's going to be a long war.

I've already banded about the word "division." As things stand, on the Western Front in August 1914, the Belgian and British Armies have about six divisions each; the German and French armies facing each other are composed of about 70 divisions each. A division is a pretty large formation. They vary in size from army to army, and often even within the same army, but if you think of a division as representing about 10,000 soldiers, you're not too far off the mark. For our purposes, we're going to be looking at whole fronts at a time, and so a division is likely to be the smallest military formation we're going to bother with. Think of them as the basic building blocks of an army.

The next larger formation is called a "corps." That's spelled C-O-R-P-S, with a silent P and S, because the word comes from French. In English, the plural of corps is corps, which is spelled the same way, but now you pronounce the S. A corps is composed of a handful of divisions. The number can be as few as two divisions, and rarely more than three or four. Corps are often organized *ad hoc* as the battle requires, and we won't be using this term very often, I don't expect, but I want you to be familiar with it, just in case.

The next larger formation after the corps is the army, and here is where it gets a little tricky, so be careful. In English, we use the word "army" in a broad sense to mean the entire land-based military of the nation, as in United States Army, German Army, French Army. But within that broader context, an "army" is also a collection of two or more corps, just as a corps is a collection of two or more divisions. You can think of an army as representing 50-100,000 soldiers.

When we talk about an entire front in the Great War, the army is going to be our most commonly used unit. Two weeks ago, when I talked about the Belgian Army, with its six divisions, well, that's a case where the word "army" means both things at the same time. The Belgian Army is the entire army of Belgium; it is also a formation about the size of an army.

The German Army is divided into eight armies, and these are called First Army, Second Army, and so on, up to Eighth Army. As the Great War opens, the German Eighth Army represents the formations in East Prussia, whose mission is to hold back any Russian offensive into Germany. We can set them aside for today and concentrate on the First through Seventh Armies, which are arrayed on the German west front, from Switzerland in the south to the Netherlands in the north. These seven German armies are numbered consecutively from the right flank to the left flank. The German First Army is therefore the farthest north, right up against the Dutch border, and so on down to the Seventh Army which is next to Switzerland.

The German offensive into Belgium is being carried out by the First, Second, and Third Armies. And by the way, while I'm at it, let me point out, just for the sake of clarity, that in any military force, when we speak of the "left flank" and the "right flank," those terms always mean "left" and "right" as you're facing your enemy. So the German left flank is the one down by Switzerland, and the German right flank is the force charging through Belgium.

Okay, let's test your understanding of this terminology now by turning around and looking at the front from the French point of view. The French are organized into five armies, which are also numbered consecutively from the right flank to the left flank. But for the French, the right flank is the one in the south, near Switzerland. This army is facing the German Seventh Army. At the other end of the line, on the French left flank, which lies just behind Luxembourg, sits the French Fifth Army. Got it? Good for you.

In Germany, the Army had a lot more political clout than the French Army had in Republican France. Because of this, as we've seen, when the German Army said it needed something, it usually got what it said it needed. The German General Staff had devised its "Schlieffen Plan" around a rapid offensive through Belgium. The German generals regarded this as an unfortunate necessity. Nothing against the Belgians, mind you, but needs must when the Devil vomits into your kettle. No one in the General Staff thought to run this decision by the political leadership of Germany—who asks civilian politicians how to run an offensive?—and as a result, the greatest shortcoming of the Schlieffen Plan isn't military, but political. It makes Germany look cruel and aggressive. That might not sound important in the middle of a war, but tarnishing your image can have huge consequences, as the Germans are going to discover.

The French government and military, by contrast, fully understood the political ramifications of war. When the French military went on alert, and then mobilized, senior commanders ordered all units to stray no closer than ten kilometers to the German or Belgian borders. The very last thing French leadership wanted was a stray bullet or accidental confrontation that would allow the Germans to paint the French as the aggressors. The French understood clearly that if war came, so would the Germans, but they were willing to sacrifice the tactical advantage of meeting the Germans right at the border for the political advantage of making it clear to all the world who was the aggressor.

Likewise, with Belgium, the French wanted to avoid any suggestion that they might violate Belgian neutrality first. Of course, the Germans were suggesting it anyway, because it would justify their own violation of Belgium, but again, the French wanted it to be clear to the whole world who the aggressor was. And when I say, "the whole world," I especially mean Great Britain, which was wavering in those early hours of the war. The French were concerned that any French violation of Belgian neutrality would lead to the British deciding to sit this one out.

But this is not to say that French strategy consisted of sitting back and waiting for Germany to make the opening moves. The French had a plan, and they believed it would win them the war. Well, it wasn't so much a plan as it was a philosophy: offense to the utmost. The French military still believed in intangible virtues such as *élan*, to win the day. Virtues so French we poor English speakers don't even have words for them. The French military also believed there was a place in modern warfare for cavalry sabres and bayonet charges, and even red pants. Yes, here and now in 1914, after even the British have traded in their lobsterback coats for khaki and the

Germans have given up their Prussian blues for field gray, the French are going to send their young men to war dressed in trousers dyed in the most visible color there is.

Still, there was a plan. The French intended to move aggressively into Alsace and Lorraine, depending on the excitement of retaking the lost provinces to generate tons and tons of *élan*. The Third and Fourth Armies, in particular, are meant to make a strong thrust into Lorraine, while a special detached command of the French VII Corps, in place to the right of First Army, would move into Alsace. But understand, the French plan is not primarily to capture real estate, Apart from taking the lost provinces, the French intend primarily to draw blood. To hit the German Army hard, and to stall out any German offensive before it gets into French territory.

And what of Fifth Army? you are probably asking. This is the one that's sitting behind Luxembourg. Fifth Army is for rapid response. Should the Germans move through southern Belgium, Fifth Army would be available to harry them, as well as link up with the Belgians and the British, who would be expected to deploy to Fifth Army's left, shoring up the flank. In the event the Germans don't invade Belgium, Fifth Army can move southeast, to assist in the offensive.

The Fifth Army had been appointed a new commander just this past April. He was the 62-year old General Charles Lanrezac. As soon as he received his appointment and got his first briefing on Plan XVII, Lanrezac spotted the problem. What if the Germans don't simply wheel through Belgium and immediately turn south, as the plan seemed to anticipate, but rather continued farther north and west in an attempt to destroy the entire French left flank? This was not an idle question. Lanrezac's new command, the Fifth Army, *was* the entire French left flank.

To this objection the overall French commander, Joseph Joffre, had a stock answer: "So much the better." In Joffre's view, the more soldiers the Germans deployed farther north, the thinner their lines would be in the south, and the more vulnerable to the coming French offensive. If the Germans tried anything really crazy, like, oh, let's say moving three whole armies through Belgium, that massive force was doomed to be outflanked and cut off by the French offensive to its south. Or to put it another way, the Fifth Army would be the bait that would tempt the Germans to shift their forces away from their center. Then Joffre would spring his trap.

Joffre ordered the first French offensive on August 7. This is the same date, you'll recall, that Ludendorff is leading men into Liège up in Belgium. This offensive would be at the opposite end of the front, down next to Switzerland. The French VII Corps—that special unit on the far right of the French line that I mentioned earlier—was sent forward into Alsace, apparently with the intent to strike a morale and propaganda blow by taking back some of the lost provinces.

The commander of VII Corps had his doubts. In order for him to maintain the sort of offensive he was being asked to launch, he told Joffre, he would need substantial supply and reinforcement that the French war plans didn't seem to provide. Joffre's response was, "That may be your plan; it is not mine."

The commander asked again, and Joffre repeated, “That may be your plan; it is not mine.” So there was nothing more to do than to get moving. That morning, just across the border, the French charged the town of Altkirch, and after six hours of fighting, took the town after a bayonet charge at the cost of about 100 casualties.

Yes, I said a bayonet charge. In 1914. Some people never learn.

But the triumphant return of the French Army to Alsatian soil was a huge emotional high. Celebrating French soldiers tore the German border posts right out of the ground and carried them through the streets of Altkirch as trophies. But the corps commander, perhaps sensing that he couldn’t count on every battle going as smoothly as this one, ordered his units to halt. Hours later, an impatient Joffre ordered VII Corps to continue forward, with the goal of occupying the larger town of Mulhouse. VII Corps did so, and found that the Germans had withdrawn from Mulhouse, and occupied it themselves on August 8.

And there was another, bigger party. French troops marched through the streets as the band played “Le Marseillaise,” and the town was plastered with posters proclaiming that *le revanche* had begun. The citizens of Mulhouse could scarcely believe their eyes. They stared dumbstruck at first, watching what must have seemed like an ancient dream made real. Once they were convinced it really was happening, they joined in the celebrations, practically forcing Alsatian chocolates into the mouths of every French soldier in sight.

All except the Germans, the folks who had moved to Mulhouse, or Mülhausen, as they called it, after the German annexation of over forty years ago. They stood quietly, watched gravely, then ran off to report to the German authorities on the disposition of VII Corps and the names of their neighbors who were celebrating the arrival of enemy troops.

For even as the French celebrated, the Germans were redeploying their own Seventh Army units, and began a counterattack the next day. Joffre relented to the point of sending another division to bolster the position, but as it turns out, *élan* is of limited use against machine guns and artillery, and the French were gone from Mulhouse as fast as they had arrived, leaving the bewildered townspeople to wonder if perhaps it had all been a dream after all. At least, until the Germans began their reprisals.

Meanwhile, at the opposite flank, the German advance into Belgium is still in full gear, as we saw in episode 82. We also saw King Albert of Belgium frantically trying to warn the French that this German offensive movement is huge, unprecedented, and potentially very dangerous. The commander of the nearby Fifth Army, General Lanrezac, is also getting worried. Joffre was at this point still dismissive. No doubt the small and outmatched Belgians were getting panicked, but he remained supremely confident that the Germans were just not capable of sending such a large force so far forward so rapidly. After all, Germany hasn’t even completed its mobilization yet, am I right? Anyway, even if it is true—say it with me—so much the better. That would

surely mean the Germans have fatally weakened the center of their line, just the place where Joffre is preparing his own offensive.

The French did go so far as to send cavalry into Belgium to reconnoiter. But the Germans met them with their own cavalry, not to mention infantry on bicycles and in motorcars, who effectively screened the German offensive from French efforts at reconnaissance. Meanwhile, aerial reconnaissance of the German center seemed to confirm that the Germans were weak there.

[music: *Danse macabre*]

By mid-August, the French mobilization was complete, and, in Joffre's view, fully ready to take the fight to German soil. General Lanrezac, over on the left flank, continued to insist that his own reconnaissance showed the Germans were advancing through Belgium by the hundreds of thousands. Then it was three quarters of a million. Then a million. At last, Lanrezac suggested the highly implausible figure of two million Germans in Belgium. The reaction at the French General Staff was to dismiss Lanrezac's worrying and focus on the coming offensive. And even if it turned out Lanrezac was right, well, so much the better.

Lanrezac, however, would not shut up. He was asking, nay, begging, for permission to redeploy to the north and west, to place the Fifth Army behind the Belgian fortress at Namur, and link up there with the Belgian Army and the arriving British Army. Joffre hated this idea, as it would compromise his brilliantly planned offensive, which he was almost ready to unleash. But then, even the General Staff's own intelligence reports were beginning to confirm that, yeah, we've got a problem in Belgium, and, yeah, there's nothing between the Germans there and Paris. Reluctantly, Joffre rearranged some units, including taking a few away from Lanrezac, and made the Fourth Army the center of the offensive, and gave Lanrezac permission to redeploy the forces he had left the way he wanted to.

Lucky Lanrezac. Now he and his reduced Fifth Army get to march eighty miles, set up a defense line square in the path of the onrushing steam locomotive that is the German offensive, and link up with the British and the Belgians—oh wait, didn't I say in episode 82 that King Albert decided to brush off the French pleas to link up with Fifth Army and withdraw instead to Antwerp? Why, yes, I believe I did. Well, at least there's the British...I said, at least there's the British...

[sound effect: chirping cricket]

Um, where are the British, anyway?

We'll get back to the question of where the British are anyway in a future episode. For now, let's just say, Lanrezac is on his own.

So what about this grand offensive? Well, the commander of VII Corps had been sacked for not showing the proper *élan*. VII Corps and its attached units would be upgraded to a new formation, the Army of Alsace. This force, along with the First and Second Armies, would launch a broad offensive into Alsace. French doctrine of the time held that if you lay down enough artillery fire to force an enemy infantry unit down, then friendly infantry can make a fifty-meter bayonet charge in less time than those enemy infantry can stand, shoulder their rifles, and start shooting again.

Of course, in the Russo-Japanese War, Russian infantry under Japanese artillery bombardment were perfectly capable of firing through holes in their defensive works without the bother of standing up first, but, um...I don't know, *élan*? The French offensive made progress at first. The German formations on the other side were part of the German Sixth and Seventh Armies, under the joint command of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. Once the shape of the French offensive became clear to him, he organized his units and soon began a counteroffensive. The heavier German artillery proved to be more effective than heavy applications of *élan*, and the French were driven back. When, when will they learn?

As for the Army of Alsace, it would take Mulhouse again, be ejected again, and before the end of August, be disbanded. Its component units would then be rushed north to shore up the crumbling defense of Paris. Wait a minute. Did I read that right? Yikes! But I'm getting ahead of myself.

News of these setbacks did not deter Joffre. He was not a man who was easily deterred. Instead, he was merely convinced that French soldiers needed some more goading to reach the proper levels of *élan*. And besides, he hadn't yet unleashed his most ferocious surprise: the offensives of the Third and Fourth Armies, as well as the newly created Army of Lorraine. These units were to attack the German center in a region running from the Ardennes forest in southern Belgium through Luxembourg and into northern Lorraine.

These French forces held off on their offensive for another week, as Joffre instructed, because the French General Staff was getting more and more of these reports of large numbers of German soldiers moving west through Belgium. Joffre continued to focus on the silver lining while disregarding the huge dark cloud headed for Paris. He held off on the offensive in the center to make sure those Germans had plenty of time to march far enough west that they would be unable to wheel around against the coming French attack. He kept insisting that if so many Germans really were on the French left, it followed inevitably that the center must be very thin indeed. The field commanders of the Third and Fourth Armies did their own reconnaissance, which seemed to be showing there were plenty of Germans in front of them, but Joffre dismissed these reports as "pessimistic." French field commanders were instructed to limit their reconnaissance, so as not to tip the Germans off to the large French offensive about to launch at them.

Joffre felt confident that his center well outnumbered the Germans deployed against them. Superior numbers, plus a generous application of *élan*, would win the day, shattering the German center, and forcing that pesky German advance into Belgium to turn around.

In fact, though they don't realize it yet, the French Third, Fourth, and Lorraine Armies are outnumbered by the two German Armies deployed against them. These would be the German Fourth Army, commanded by the Duke of Württemberg, and the Fifth Army, under the command of the Crown Prince, the Kaiser's eldest son, also named Wilhelm. The German Schlieffen Plan called for these two armies to advance as well. Not so fast and aggressively as their comrades to the north, but fast enough to cover their flank.

But the German command had their eye on something more than merely covering their own flank. At this rural corner of northern Lorraine, where France shares a short border with Luxembourg, with the Belgian and German borders not very far away, lay the best iron mines in France. Germany had just missed annexing these lands back in 1871, when it took the lost provinces. That oversight had occurred only because the rich iron ore deposits there had not yet been discovered.

Now, in 1914, the Germans meant to correct that little oversight, and the German Fifth Army, under the command of the Crown Prince, was given the glorious assignment of seizing the iron mines. The Fourth and Fifth Armies began a cautious advance into French territory on August 19. Cautious because German intelligence had some inkling that the French might begin an offensive in this sector, and warned the commanders, who advanced their troops carefully, entrenching themselves at every stop.

August 21 was the date for the beginning of the French offensive, and the day began with a thick fog. French and German units practically ran into each other before they realized they were on contested ground. You will not be surprised to learn, though, that German field gray blends into fog a lot better than those French red pants.

The Germans hunkered down. The French didn't even like to give out too many picks and shovels to their soldiers because how is that *élan*? Those confrontations on the first day were scattered and inconclusive, but the French began launching their bayonet charges in earnest on the next day, August 22. And it turned out that machine guns could fire faster than soldiers can charge after all.

The casualties were appalling, and unlike anything even hardened soldiers had ever seen before. Bodies were piled so high that the bodies on the tops of the pile were almost upright. Whenever there was a lull in the fighting, the soldiers could hear the voices of the wounded crying out everywhere, in French and in German. French officers fell as often as their men. The French Army custom of officers wearing gloves made them that much easier for the German snipers to find.

By the morning of the day following, August 23, many French units were in retreat. Joffre was told that the French armies were now too disorganized to receive his orders. He insisted upon giving them anyway. The General Staff had done *its* job, Joffre said, by deploying the army's strongest units at the place where the enemy was the weakest. Now it was up to the field commanders to make proper use of the advantage they had been given.

But by the end of the day, it was clear the French offensive was spent, with nothing to show for it but casualties in the hundred thousands. The lost provinces would not see French soldiers again for another four years. The precious iron mines at the frontier, which were badly needed for the French war effort, would supply the German war effort instead, keeping the Central Powers fighting for years to come. It turned out that the traditional Prussian virtues of *Treue und Selbstverleugnung*, loyalty and self-denial, were more effective on the modern battlefield than old-fashioned *élan*.

The Kaiser sent his eldest son a telegram, announcing that he was to be awarded the Iron Cross, First and Second class. Many Iron Crosses were handed out on the Western Front that season. One puckish Austrian military adviser remarked that the only way a German soldier could avoid getting an Iron Cross was by suicide.

[music: *Danse macabre*]

As for the Fifth Army under General Lanrezac, it was now to be found just south of the Belgian fortress at Namur, taking up its position along the river Meuse. The British Expeditionary Force was moving into position just north of Namur, meaning that these units are now in the crosshairs of the main German advance.

The French General Staff at this time estimated the German offensive through Belgium as amounting to 17 or 18 divisions. Lanrezac's Fifth Army amounted to 13 divisions, with two more reserve divisions on the way. When you add in the five British divisions and the Belgian division literally holding the fort at Namur, this makes a total of 21 divisions, which, in Joffre's view, was a comfortable advantage. The British General Staff agreed. As Henry Wilson put it on August 20, if it were true what the worriers said, that the German offensive was larger than believed, well, "[t]he more the better, as it will weaken their center." Where have I heard that before?

Lanrezac did not agree, and felt his situation was more precarious. In fact, it was worse than even Lanrezac knew. The Germans had 30 divisions against him, with eight more on the way, an almost 2-1 advantage.

Joffre ordered Lanrezac to begin an offensive on August 21, the same day that the Third and Fourth Armies were beginning their offensives farther south. Lanrezac begged off, arguing that the British weren't ready yet. Joffre accepted this excuse, and left to Lanrezac's discretion when to begin. By this time, the German attack on the Belgian fortifications around Namur had begun.

The Times of London confidently predicted that Namur would hold out for months. In fact, the Germans would draw upon their experience at Liège and the forts at Namur would fall in days, not months.

By late in the day on August 22, the German were already across the Meuse and advancing. The French fought bravely, but had to fall back. The German artillery barrages were merciless, the French unprepared for them. Overhead, German airplanes acted as artillery spotters. French soldiers soon learned to take cover whenever a German plane flew by, as it meant a bombardment was soon to come.

On the morning of August 23, the cavalry on Fifth Army's left flank fell back, opening up a gap between the French and their British allies. Streams of Belgian refugees clogged the roads leading west, fleeing the endless artillery bombardments. At noon came the news that the Belgians were abandoning Namur. Then came the news that the French III Corps, the new left flank, was also crumbling. Then came the news that the offensives of the Fourth and Third Armies had failed, meaning that Lanrezac was now also vulnerable on his right flank.

Lanrezac was no doubt conscious, as he took stock of his situation on the evening of August 23, that he was less than 100 kilometers away from the French border town of Sedan, where 44 years earlier, the Germans had surrounded an entire French Army, the event which sealed France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Without consulting Joffre, Lanrezac ordered a general retreat.

The British Expeditionary Force was able to hold its own, in spite of facing a German force twice its size. The Germans had had the bad luck of stumbling right into the center of the British defensive line. It took them time to scout out the extent of the British defenses, and more time to call in reinforcements to flank them. But by this time, the British had gotten word of the withdrawals of the Belgian and French forces to their right, and began to retreat in good order, marred by the fact that one British battalion never received the retreat order and was surrounded and annihilated.

It was the first time the British Army had deployed in Western Europe since the Battle of Waterloo, 99 years and two months ago. Having rushed into battle against the Germans, they were now rushing away from it, having suffered some 1,600 casualties in their first day of fighting.

These battles, from Namur in the north to Alsace in the south, over four days in August, are collectively known as the Battle of the Frontiers. France suffered 140,000 casualties, killed, wounded, and missing, over these four days. To put that figure in perspective, France lost twice as many soldiers as the entire British Expeditionary Force that had just arrived.

One of the casualties of the Battle of the Frontiers was the vaunted Plan XVII. By August 24, all French offensives had been spent, every French Army was in retreat. The best that could be hoped for now was to end the retreats and stabilize the front lines. Joffre of course, blamed the

field commanders for insufficient *élan*, although it would be closer to the truth to say that the biggest French problem was an excess of *élan*. The obvious scapegoat was Lanrezac and his unauthorized retreat. The British were already blaming him for forcing them back. Joffre would join in, and by September 3, Lanrezac would be relieved as commander of the Fifth Army.

But by the end of the war, Lanrezac would live to see his reputation restored. The British and French commands would come around to the view that France may owe its survival in 1914 to General Lanrezac, the man who first saw the crucial importance of meeting the German advance through Belgium, and whose timely withdrawal may indeed have spared France a second Sedan, not to mention saving the British Expeditionary Force from total annihilation.

But on August 24, all that could be seen was the triumph of the Schlieffen Plan, and the utter collapse of Plan XVII. The German Army was advancing everywhere, and forgotten were any thoughts of retaking the lost provinces, or of any quick and decisive French offensive. Now the only thought left was the survival of the French Republic.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and a big thank you to Jeff and to everyone else who signed on as patrons through the Patreon page at patreon.com/markpainter. If you'd like to become a patron for as little as \$2 a month, head on over there, or go to the podcast website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, for the link. Or you can give a one-time contribution through PayPal. And while you're at the website, leave a comment and let everyone know what you thought of today's episode. You'll also find a playlist of the music used in every episode. And leave a review on the podcast page at the iTunes store; that will help other people find the podcast.

I'm going to be at the Confluence science fiction conference in Pittsburgh next weekend, so there will be no new episode, I'm afraid, but I hope you'll join me again in two weeks' time as we turn our attention back to the Balkans and the war between Austria and Serbia. Remember Austria and Serbia? In July 1914—three weeks ago—the Great War was all about the confrontation between Austria and Serbia. You've probably noticed that the war isn't really about that anymore. That's the funny thing about the Great War. A month in, it was suddenly about something completely different. Still, there is fighting going on between Austria and Serbia and it's time to check in and see what's happening. The Serbian front, in two weeks, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I mentioned Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria as one of the German Army generals. He was 45 years old at the time, and was regarded as the best of Germany's royal generals, probably the only one of them who actually had the skills to justify putting him in command of an army. He was one of the earliest high-ranking Germans to conclude that Germany could not win the war, but he kept his military command out of a sense of royal obligation, resigning immediately upon the armistice.

Rupprecht's father died in 1921, which would have made him King of Bavaria, had Germany not become a republic after the war. He never abdicated his claim to the throne, and at various times there were movements to re-establish the Bavarian monarchy with Rupprecht on the throne, but nothing ever came of them. Rupprecht had been born in an independent Kingdom of Bavaria, then lived through the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the Allied occupation of Germany. He lived to see the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany before passing away in 1955, at the age of 86.

[music: Closing War Theme]