

Field Marshal Radetzky and his time

In 1848, the outbreak of revolution once again threatened the existence of the Habsburg Monarchy.

Imperial armies not only fought against insurgent citizens and workers in various cities, but also against revolutionary and nationalist troops in Hungary. In the final phase of the revolution in October 1848, troops from revolutionary Hungary marched towards Vienna to support the insurgents there against the imperial army, but were repulsed near Schwechat by troops loyal to the emperor.

Deployment of all available military forces was necessary to put down the revolution and wage war in two theatres. At times, the fighting in Italy took on the character of a „blitzkrieg“.

The imperial commander-in-chief in Italy, Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky (1766 – 1858) defeated the Sardinian-Piedmontese army in a series of skirmishes and battles and personally concluded an armistice.

This truce was cancelled by Sardinia-Piedmont in 1849.

Radetzky defeated the enemy's army again in the battles of Mortara and Novara, afterwards concluding a peace that was to last several years.

The situation in Hungary was different: the fighting dragged on throughout the winter and most of 1849 and was only brought to an end by co-operation of Austrian and Russian troops.

On 2 December 1848, Emperor Ferdinand I abdicated the throne in favour of his nephew Franz (Joseph). This marked the beginning of the 68-year-long reign of Franz Joseph I, which began and ended in war.

Transformation to constitutional monarchy under Franz Joseph I.

After the victories in Italy and Hungary, the young emperor wished to consolidate his realm and bring back strict central authoritarian rule.

However, he was only partially successful.

In the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, Field Marshal Radetzky embodied this centralised rule until 1858, when he retired at the age of 90, shortly before his death.

In 1859, Austria suffered a defeat in another war against Sardinia-Piedmont, which was allied to France. After the battles of Magenta and Solferino, the Habsburg Monarchy had to give away Lombardy. As a domestic political consequence of the defeat, Austria began to transform itself into a constitutional monarchy. Neo-absolutism was no longer tenable.

The German-Danish War

In 1864, Austria went to war together with Prussia against Denmark. The Danish king wanted to integrate the Danish-administered but predominantly German-speaking Duchy of Schleswig into the Danish state under constitutional law.

The Austrians under Field Marshal Lieutenant Ludwig von Gablenz (1814 - 1874) won victories at Oeversee and Vejle. Holstein came under Austrian administration, Schleswig under Prussian administration.

The Prussian-Austrian War of 1866

Conflicting positions regarding the affiliation of the two duchies were ultimately the trigger that led to open war in the longstanding quarrel between Prussia and Austria for supremacy in the German Confederation.

Alliance against Austria

On 8 April 1866, Prussia signed an alliance with the Kingdom of Italy against Austria. Under the command of Archduke Albrecht, the Austrian southern army was victorious at Custoza on 24 June 1866.

After a series of engagements in the north, the decisive battle took place at Königgrätz on 3 July. The Austrian army under General Ludwig von Benedek (1804 - 1881) suffered a crushing defeat.

The Peace of Prague finally ousted Austria from the German Confederation. The political focus was now on the territories under direct Habsburg rule, which had grown over the centuries.

The emperor's brother

In addition to state history, the fates of individuals like Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian (1832 - 1867), the emperor's brother, stand out time and again.

He accepted the Mexican imperial crown in 1864 through French mediation. However, he did not succeed in establishing a new Habsburg dynasty in Mexico and ruling the country in peace. He was defeated in battle by Mexican troops under Benito Juárez (1806 - 1872), then captured and executed in 1867.