

Thirty Years War (in a nutshell)



It always seems easier for historians to divide major events into identifiable pieces. Perhaps it makes complex circumstances and details appear more intelligible. This habit is no less present in the study of the 30 Years War, which ravaged Europe from 1618 to 1648. But in the case of this war, the phases outlined by historians do tend to make sense, because we can isolate the major shifts in players on the stage, and what that means towards the playing out of the conflict.

The Bohemian Phase

- The first phase is commonly known as the Bohemian phase (1618-25). Aptly, most of this phase of the war unfolds in Bohemia. It was instigated by, among other things, the Defenestration of Prague and the ensuing struggle over the throne involving the Protestant nobles of the territory and Ferdinand, the nephew and heir presumptive to the Holy Roman Emperor, Matthias. This phase goes badly for the Protestant side. Their newly enlisted leader, Frederick of Palatinate, and his forces were thoroughly defeated by Ferdinand and his own forces at the Battle of White Mountain. In point of fact, the Protestants are slaughtered. Ferdinand proceeds to take land away from the nobles throughout the kingdom and give it to Catholics. The one good outcome of all of this for the Protestants is that other Protestant rulers and nobles throughout Europe start to consider the cause their own.

The Danish Phase

- Next comes the Danish phase which, naturally, see the Danes enter on the Protestant side. As with the previous phase, this goes unwell for the Protestants. The Catholics win pretty much every battle, and they spread fear through their skillful, yet unscrupulous, use of mercenary armies. Things seem bleak for the Protestant forces, as not a single Lutheran state or principality in Germany is spared invasion, and lands within them that had formerly been seized from the Catholic Church by Protestants were returned to the Church through the Restitution Act.

The Swedish Phase

- But the Protestants had a large boon coming: Gustavus Adolphus, the king of Sweden, was joining their side with his thoroughly well-trained, professional and national army. This begins the Swedish Phase (1630-35). We'll delve more into the importance of his concept of a national army in another tutorial, but suffice it to say that the Swedes start winning battles. They tear down through central Germany thanks to their soldierly skill, and the excellent generalship of their king, Gustavus. Things reach a head at the Battle of Lutzen in 1632, and it's an epic victory for the Protestants. However, tragedy strikes as well; Gustavus Adolphus is mortally wounded in the fighting, and he dies shortly afterward. With the death of their king, the Swedes more or less withdraw from the war entirely.

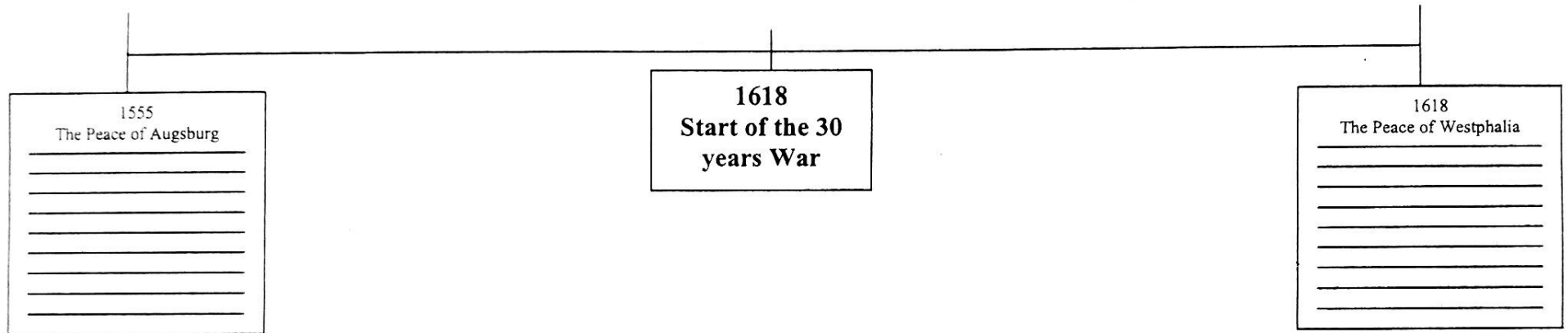
The French Phase

- The next and final phase of the war is known as the French Phase. Here, the French enter on the side of the Protestants, not out of religious fraternity – for the French monarchy remained decidedly catholic – but out of fear that Hapsburg power was growing too strong. Stamina and enthusiasm for the war peter out on all sides, and no decisive battles seem to occur. In the end, the two weary sides sign the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and hostilities come to an end.

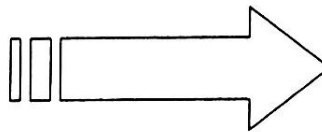
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Thirty Years War



Cause



Effect

Summarize the 30 Years War
