

The Battle of Vienna (1683)

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The Battle Of Vienna

Throughout the 16th and the 17th centuries the Ottomans conducted their exploration and conquest of Europe. The Ottoman Empire was the superpower at the time, along with Poland, Spain and France. The Ottomans were predominantly Muslims; they wanted religious uniformity throughout the land they conquered. When other countries refused to submit, the Ottomans forced them. This policy prompted the Ottoman conquest, which led to the Battle of Vienna. *The Battle Of Vienna* became an the encounter between the Ottomans (Turks) and the people of Vienna which ushered in centuries of peaceful exchange.

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The Viennese

Vienna was established in 500 B.C., by the Celts, a diverse group of people that lived as tribes in the Iron Age Europe. For the next 2000 years, leadership of Vienna changed many times without one ruler staying in power long. By 1440 A.D, Vienna became the fortified capital of the Habsburg dynasty, and in 1483, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. It was then known as “The Golden Apple of the West.” The Holy Roman Empire has been ruling Central Europe since 800 AD until it was obliterated by the French army under the command of Napoleon in 1806.

¹ The flag of the Holy Roman Empire in the 17th century.

The Holy Roman Empire, which based its authority on the Catholic Church, had many religious battles with others. The Battle of Vienna occurred because the Ottomans wanted to expand Islam into Europe and the Holy Roman Empire was the Ottoman's great obstacle between themselves and the rest of Europe. With this in mind, the Ottomans, or Turks, began their conquest, with the "Golden Apple of the West" first on the list.

The Ottomans

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*"The Crescent Moon (of Islam) climbs up the night sky
and the Gallic cock sleeps not!"*

-The Siege of Vienna By: John Stoye, published by
New York: Pegasus, 2006. Print.



The Ottoman empire was founded in 1299 A.D., and at the time, the empire consisted of 38 independent nations. The Ottoman Empire was primarily Islamic, whereas the neighboring Holy Roman Empire was primarily Catholic. For centuries the Ottoman empire, led by Suleiman the Magnificent (who was the Grand Vizier at the time), first tried and failed in 1529. Now, in 1683, Kara Mustafa, the newly appointed Grand Vizier over the Ottoman Army, set out to conquer the "Golden Apple of the West", Vienna. Kara Mustafa was willing to do anything to accomplish that goal. With

² The flag of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century.

his silver tongue, he persuaded the emperor that Allah, (Islam's sun god) willed them to bring Islam to all of Europe and nothing will stand in the way of Allah.

An Army Is Amassed

Throughout 1529 Sultan Suleiman I organized a great army in Bulgaria with the goal of securing control over all of Hungary and therefore reducing the threat posed by Ferdinand I, the head of the Holy Roman Empire. The Sultan's army consisted of tens of thousands of armed men, all willing to die for their Grand Vizier and for Islam. When a man became (or was forced to become) a Janissary, he was not permitted to marry in order that all his allegiance belongs to the Ottoman Empire. This was a cruel but brilliant way to secure a loyal army where the soldiers were all prepared to face death on the battlefields. Now in spring of 1683 a lethal army of about 300,000 men were eager and ready for battle, and willing to risk their lives for their Grand Vizier and Allah.

The Battle Began

Spring 1683

The fearsome Ottoman army of 300,000 men marched across plains, mountains and valleys on their way as they attempt to destroy Vienna. They had thousands of battle horses, dynamites, and numerous deadly artilleries. The fortified walls of Vienna were equipped with 312 cannons. Around the city, there was a 20-meter wide, 16-meter high trench and collapsible bridges. When the Turks arrived, they advanced slowly and

dug trenches to avoid everything and anything that could cause fatalities. Upon arrival, Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa ordered men to start digging tunnels under the wall as a means to surprise and destroy the city.

Destruction From Within

The Ottomans had a plethora of men and artillery. The Ottomans soldiers outnumbered the Viennese defenders 20 to 1. They surrounded the city and paralyzed it by cutting off water, food, supply and any contact with their allies. Although food and water were essential, the more pressing matter was the mines. Like moles and rabbits, the Ottomans dug tunnels underneath the the supposedly impenetrable walls of Vienna. The Turks succeeded in igniting 41 small mines that did more to distress the Viennese than to penetrate the wall. Count von Strahlenberg, commander of the Viennese army, commissioned Georg Michalowicz to deliver messages to Jan III Sobieski (King of Poland), begging him to send reinforcements.

The Relief Force

After the constant pleading for immediate aid, Jan Sobieski eventually agreed, but it was not clear whether the help from Poland would arrive in time. Sobieski and his tens of thousands of men along with horses, firearms, and artillery embarked on the 400-mile journey through mountains and through valleys to Vienna. Prior to the Battle of

Vienna, Poland and Vienna were not on good terms. Both sides despised the other due to previous conflicts and disagreements. Poland and the Ottomans were enemies, but that wasn't the main reason they came to the aid of Vienna. The main reason was that if Vienna fell, the Ottomans would press on to Poland, Rome, France, and the rest of Western Europe, perhaps farther. When the men of the Holy Roman Empire were fighting, they had more than their own lives in mind. They were fighting for their way of life and the future of their homeland and families. Undoubtedly, without the reinforcing troops Vienna would have fallen, leaving a path unguarded for the Ottomans to continue on their conquest of Europe.

Turning Of The Tide

September 11 1683 22:00

The Turks were at the gates, which have been weakened by the siege. Georg Michalowicz had returned from Poland pleading Jan III Sobieski and the Polish troops, to come and save Vienna from the threat that was at their doorstep. Now Count von Strahlenberg had assigned him the task of finding location the mines beneath them. Using a simple but brilliant tool, they were able to tell where the mines were. They would use a drum and dry peas. They would place the peas on the drum and move it around to various locations. If the peas moved, then the Turks were digging below. "By the will of God" they were able to find the mine that had the ability to break a hole in the wall, with potential to bring Vienna to certain ruin. Throughout the course of countless hours, Georg Michalowicz and other soldiers were able to dig a small hole to the

massive mine. On September 12, 1683 the Ottomans had armed a mine that would succeed in razing the wall, allowing Ottoman troops to storm Vienna, but Georg Michalowitz, a spy who, along with other soldiers, were able to defuse the mine, literally



seconds before it was going to detonate. They could see the sparks flying off of the wire leading to the explosives. They sent the smallest man into the mine, and it was by mere seconds that the man was able to defuse the wire. It was believed that he was unable to defuse the explosive, Vienna would have been lost.

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With the massive mine defused by the Viennese, the Ottomans had started to destroy Vienna by pure manpower. As the Ottoman troop advanced toward the city, the defenders looked helplessly towards the hills for the Polish force to arrive. Right when all hope seemed lost, they saw a red and white flag break over the crest of the hill. The Polish troops led by Jan Sobieski arrived and charged toward the Ottoman in what was believed to be the largest cavalry charge up to that point. The battle continued for hours until the Turks finally surrendered in defeat and suffered major casualties.

The Impact Today

The Battle of Vienna (1683) ended the exploration and expansion into Europe by the Ottomans. The Holy Roman Empire lasted for another century before it was

³ The Polish flag in the 17th century.

destroyed by Napoleon in early 19th century, and the Ottoman Empire continued until it fell apart after World War I. The two empires, representing two different religions and civilizations did not engage in any major warfare after their encounter in 1683. After the Battle of Vienna, Europe went through the Enlightenment Era, a critical period where the now-familiar concepts of basic human rights, democratic societies and republican government were able to develop in Europe and later spread to America. Had the Battle of Vienna turned out differently, the European history in the last four hundred years would have to be completely re-written as the people would likely have adopted a different religion, created a very different system of government, and developed a different way of life.

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