

PHD RESEARCH

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What sways generals ? Personal factors, including age, in military decision-making in the wars of 1870-71 and 1914-18

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This thesis identifies individual psychological and emotional factors in the making of crucial military decisions. As well as dealing with senior military commanders, it also analyses the behaviour of civilian leaders with strategic responsibilities in the two wars in question. The experience of war in 1870-71 is identified as a particular emotional factor in decisions taken in the subsequent war; as was the British experience of the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902). Conceived as an essay in military history, and specifically that of two wars which largely determined the present shape of Europe, the thesis starts by recalling the common theme of European poetry and literature in the 1920s, to the effect that the great suffering of the war of 1914-18 was attributable to the conceit of an elite of 'old men'. It then sets out to provide a psychological and human explanation as to how that experience became possible when power was located in the hands of nationally respected leaders.