

The First Schleswig War  
in  
Schleswig Holstein 1848 to 1850



Nick Svendsen

# **THE FIRST SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN WAR**

**in 1848 to 50**

**by**

**Nick Svendsen**

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## Chapter 1

The Duchy of Schleswig is situated at the base of the Jutland peninsula (Map 1). The old border between the Kingdom of Denmark and this Duchy was situated at a stream called the King's River (*Konge Åen*) which is north of the current border. The southern border of the Duchy is the river Eider. The Duchy of Holstein is the land between the Eider and Elb Rivers.



**Map 1**

The Kingdom of Denmark is the remaining part of Jutland north of the King's River, Funen, all the islands around Funen, Zealand, and before 1658, also Scania, Halland and Bleking in southern Sweden (ceded to Sweden after several wars).

The Duchy of Schleswig was the old borderland between the Danish and the German speaking peoples. Charles the Great created his Carolingian Empire

by conquest of most of Europe in the years before 800. His empire ran from Italy in the south to the Eider River in the north. However, the conquest of Saxony which Holstein was part of, took 30 years and was not completed before 804. During this period the Saxons made several bloody attempts to get free of the Carolingian hegemony but their efforts were in vain.

The Danish King Godfred saw Charles the Great as a significant threat to his power and therefore supported the Saxons' resistance. In order to defend his realm, he expanded the rampart called Dannevirke. The first part was built around year 700 AC.

This defence system is situated at the southern border of the Duchy of Schleswig some 25 km north of the river Eider (Map 2). The manning of Dannevirke required an army. As the Danish king could not be present at all times in the borderland, he needed a proxy and that was the Duke of Schleswig. So, the later King Valdemar the Victorious made his son Abel, Duke of Schleswig in 1232. King Valdemar had several sons who were appointed dukes of the other borderlands as was the custom at that time. It is this arrangement which is the seed for the later conflicts between the Duke of Schleswig and the King of Denmark.



**Map 2**

Abel was often in conflict with the King and in alliance with the Schleswig Holstein dukes. When Abel's last descendant died in 1375 the wealthy and strong counts of Holstein took over the Duchy of Schleswig as a vassal to the Danish King.

Holstein belonged to the German empire and the Counts were therefore also vassals of the German emperor. Eventually the last of the descendants of the Holstein counts died in 1459 and the Danish king Christian I, (crowned 1448), had the right to take the Duchy of Schleswig back as a reverting realm. However, he also wanted to take control of the rich Duchy of Holstein and therefore had himself elected by the Assemblies of the Estate of the realms for both Duchies as Duke of Schleswig and Count of Holstein.

The election took place in 1460 in the town of Ribe in the northern part of Schleswig. He signed a document where he promised to keep the peace and to keep the Duchies together for all time ("*ewige tosamende ungedelt*").

In the subsequent years Schleswig Holstein was nevertheless split into a royal part and into a part which was given to the King's brother who became Duke of Gottorp. This led to further dispute where the Duke of Gottorp often supported enemies of Denmark.

During the Great Nordic War in 1709 to 1720 between Denmark and Sweden, the Duke supported the Swedes who were defeated, and the King of Denmark, Frederik IV took over the sovereignty of the Duchies. The King demanded an oath of loyalty from his sovereignties and released them from their loyalty to the Duke of Gottorp. All the nobilities of Schleswig Holstein were called to the castle of Gottorp and on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1721 they (including the Dukes of Augustenborg and Glücksburg) all signed a declaration of loyalty and acknowledgement of the Law of the King. Frederik adhered to precedent and therefore ruled Denmark as King, and the Duchies as Duke. The realms had common finances and defence but were otherwise administered separately.

Although Danish was spoken in the southern portion of Schleswig in the old times, the German language became more and more common further north. In 1848 the border between the German and the Danish speaking populations was approximately where it is today (the current border between Denmark and Germany).

After the fall of Napoleon 1 in 1814, the allied European nations took power and at the peace of the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1814 it was decided to settle all the European disputes at a Congress in Vienna that same year. All the dominant countries of Europe were represented plus the Danish King Frederik VI. The German Confederation which was abolished by Napoleon was reinstated and Holstein became a member (Map 3). However, Frederik VI resisted Schleswig's Confederation membership as he stated that it had always been Danish.



Norway, who was in union with Denmark was ceded from Denmark the same year and given to Sweden. The Danish king was compensated in Germany with the Duchy of Lauenburg (Map 1). He was then king of Denmark and Duke of Schleswig Holstein and Lauenburg.

The Napoleonic wars from 1796 to 1814 were for Germany a battle of independence from the domination of France. It was also the time when nationalism came to Europe, in particular to Germany. After the English attack on Copenhagen in 1807, Denmark joined France and declared war on Britain. The German speaking part of Schleswig Holstein did not sympathise with this alliance.

The English blockade of Europe during the Napoleonic wars had a negative effect on the economy of both Denmark and Germany, due to the lack of overseas trade. Furthermore, the last battles of the war took place in Schleswig Holstein, where Danish and Schleswig Holstein troops fought together (for the last time) against the allied troops (Swedish, German and Russian) led by the Swedish king.

In 1813 Holstein was occupied by mostly Swedish and Prussian armies after the end of the hostilities. The population had to supply these armies during the wintertime, which was never forgotten and remembered as the "Cossack winter".

After the reorganisation of Europe where Norway was ceded from Denmark, the Duchies constituted of only about 40% of the population in the Danish King's realm and the German influence was increased.

The Schleswig Holstein nobility therefore tried to increase its influence in 1822 by having Schleswig incorporated into the German Confederation. The Danish King strongly resisted this. There was no support for the incorporation from the Parliament of the Confederation in Frankfurt so for the next eight years nothing happened.

The absolute Danish monarchy from 1814 to 1848 was in its last phase before democracy was introduced. After the July revolution in France in 1830, liberal movements arose all over Europe including Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. The demand from the liberals was for a democratic constitution. In order to suppress the liberals, the Danish King had a number arrested and jailed.

According to the Wiener Congress of 1814 Holstein was entitled to a new constitution and the parliament of the German Confederation in Frankfurt demanded that the Danish Government prepare one. The Danish King had to do something and therefore a commission was initiated and asked to work on a draft constitution.

In 1834 the work of the commission was finished. The result was four Assemblies of the Estates of the Realm (*Stænderforsamlinger*), one for the islands of Zealand, Funen and Bornholm with representatives also from Iceland and the Faerø Islands (assembly place Roskilde near Copenhagen),

one for Jutland (assembly place in the town of Viborg in Central Jutland), one for Schleswig (assembly place in the town of Schleswig) and one for Holstein (assembly place in the town of Itzehoe). The members of the assemblies were partly appointed by the King and partly elected by the population.

The right to vote was only available to men above the age of 30 who had land or income worth a value between 1000 and 4000 Rigsbankdaler subject to where he was living (the highest income was in Copenhagen). Hence only a minor part of the population was able to vote.

The election for the assemblies took place in 1834 and later that same year, they had their first meeting. It was in these Assemblies of the Estates of the Realm that the German and Danish interests clashed. The German and Danish Liberal movements had in essence the same goal, a new and free constitution. However, the German liberals were allied with the Pan-Germanic movement whereas the Danish Liberals had an affinity to the other Scandinavian countries.

The Pan-Germanic movement was nationalistic. Germany was at that time divided into many small countries (Map 2) and the movement argued for a united Germany. The liberals of Schleswig Holstein sympathised and demanded that Schleswig, like Holstein and Lauenburg, should join the German Confederation and that the three Duchies should have a common constitution.

It was recollected that King Christian I of Denmark in 1460 had issued the letter in the town of Ribe, which declared that Schleswig and Holstein should be together and undivided. On the other hand, the Danish population wanted Denmark's southern border to be at the river Eider.

King Christian VIII, who became king in 1839 when Frederik VI died, tried to find common ground between these two trains of thought in an attempt to keep his realm together.

An issue was what language should be used in the two Assemblies of the Realm for the Duchies. So far, the language had been German but the Danish speaking members asked for permission to speak Danish. This was rejected but a petition was sent to the King. He eventually declared that if a member was not able to speak German, he was allowed to speak Danish.

The Danish Christian VIII 's son, the later Frederik VII had no children and therefore no heir. The law of the King (the old constitution) did not apply to Holstein but it was disputed that it was applicable to the Duchy of Schleswig. Christian August, the Duke of Augustenborg in South Jutland was a close relative to the royal family and therefore raised the claim that he should inherit the Duchy of Schleswig when King Frederik VII died. This dispute, the issue whether the Duchies should join Germany, the language and the issue of a new constitution was the conflict between the two population groups. Between 1830 and 1848 these differences expanded until the rebellion in 1848.

The Duke of Augustenborg (Figure 1.1) was part of a sub branch of the royal family and, as mentioned, closely related through later marriages. Queen Caroline Mathilde Queen of Denmark married to the Danish King Christian VII had a daughter with her lover Struense. This daughter Louise Augusta (1771 – 1843) was half sister to King Frederik VI and married Friedrich Christian of Augustenborg (1765 – 1814). In this marriage there were three children: Christian August (1798-1869), Friedrich Prince of Nör (1800-1865), and Caroline Amalie (1796 – 1881). The latter was married to King Christian VIII of Denmark.



**Figure 1.1 - Christian August, Duke of Augustenborg (1798 – 1869) became duke in 1814 after his father. He was the elder brother to the Prince of Nör and in contrast to his brother, who was very impulsive, he was a cool and calculating politician.**

Augustenborg is situated on the Island of Als and was a large estate. Christian August, a cool and calculating politician, became Duke in 1814 inheriting the title from his father. His brother, the Prince of Nör (Figure 1.2) in contrast was very impulsive.

The Prince of Nör was very popular and therefore elected to the Assembly of the Realm where he was a member of the conservatives. In 1842 he was appointed as Governor and commanding General in the Duchies by the King. Two years later he resigned as Governor, as a protest against the open letter from the King concerning the royal order of succession which was not in either his or his brother's favour.

Christian August was sometimes in opposition to his brother especially in 1842 when Nör was appointed Governor, an appointment which Christian wanted for himself as part of his political plans. Christian had in 1837 raised the question about the royal succession in an anonymous publication. He



**Figure 1.2 - Friederich Emil August, Prince of Schleswig Holstein Sønderborg Augustenborg also called the Prince of Nör (1800 – 1865).** *The Prince of Nör was officer and in 1848 Major General in the Danish Army. During the first year of the war he commanded the Schleswig Holstein Army but in September of the same year when General Bonin took over the command he resigned from the army. In 1851 he was expelled from Denmark and the Duchies and stayed in Germany and also for awhile in London. There was no use for him after the war in 1864 and in 1865 he died on a trip to Egypt. believed that he and his family would be the closest to inherit the Duchies after Fredrick VII.*

The Augustenborg family had been considered for the Danish crown but Christian August's political activity did not make him popular in Denmark and with the King. Christian VIII tried to solve the matter of the royal succession by the issue of an open letter which said that the declaration of loyalty of 1721 made any earlier claims nil and void and the law of the King was therefore effective in Schleswig but that it could be disputed in Holstein.

The letter made the Augustenborg family and many others in Schleswig Holstein furious. The King and his government were strongly criticised in the Duchies and in Germany. This created a considerable amount of animosity against Denmark all over Germany.

1848 was the year of revolution in Europe. It commenced in France with the rebellion against King Louis Phillipe of France, who had to leave Paris on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1848 and a provisional government was formed. It was there that the ideas of democracy emerged and it stemmed from the middle classes, which demanded power. However, shortly after the first revolution the workers of Paris rebelled against the new provisional government. This was the event, which also ignited insurrection in Schleswig, Holstein and Denmark. In Germany civil unrest erupted, and in March of the same year there were revolutions all over Germany; e.g., the 1<sup>st</sup> of March revolution in Baden, the



**Figure 1.3 – Friederich Wilhelm IV (1795 - 1861)** *Friedrich Wilhelm IV became king in 1840 until his death although his brother Wilhelm I was constituted as king in 1854 due to Friederich Wilhelm's poor health in his last years. Friederich Wilhelm had on the 18th of March 1848 proclaimed a free constitution and when the citizens of Berlin gathered around the castle to applaud him they were shouting "Away with the military". The troops had just arrived into the city and were ordered to remove the mob. The soldiers were shooting and killing people which ignited the rebellion. (Photo from Wikipedia 2007)*

3<sup>rd</sup> of March demonstrations in Cologne and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March a rebellion in Heidelberg.

In Vienna on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March the Duke Metternich was dismissed and the Emperor of Austria was forced to construct a democratic constitution. King Ludwig of Bavaria abdicated on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March and his son Maximilian took over. In Berlin there was a demonstration in front of the royal palace. King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia (Figure 1.3) ordered the military to intervene. Overnight there were fighting in the streets of Berlin leaving many dead and wounded.

The next day the King had to apologise and in order keep face he blamed the military for the violence. The officers of the army were furious and the King had lost prestige. Conveniently, Christian August the Duke of Augustenborg had just arrived in Berlin on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March in order to ask for help from the Prussian King to solve the conflict in Schleswig Holstein. It was just what Friedrich Wilhelm IV needed. He ordered the army to leave Berlin and it marched towards Schleswig Holstein. The King also submitted a letter to the Duke in which he declared his wishes to support the Schleswig Holstein cause. He furthermore asked the German states which supplied troops to the 10<sup>th</sup> Confederate Army Corps to send troops to Holstein. The King had revived the old trick of finding an external enemy to divert attention from the internal crisis.

Christian VIII died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1848 and Frederik VII became king of Denmark (Figure 1.4). In his first meeting with the cabinet a new constitution was discussed. The cabinet agreed to recommend a common constitution for the Kingdom and the Duchies.





King Frederik VII  
Lithography from 1848 by E. Baerentzen



A. F. Tscherning  
Secretary of War of the March ministry



A. W. Moltke  
Prime Minister of the March ministry

Figure 1.4 - King Frederik VII of Denmark (1807 - 1863)  
the Primeminister he appointed on March 22 1848.  
Count Moltke (Konsejlsresident)  
and the Secretary of War A. F. Tscherning

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March there was a general meeting of the populace in Copenhagen in a theatre called Casino to discuss "Denmark to the River Eider".

In Schleswig the populace demanded a democratic constitution for the Duchies and in a meeting of the Assembly of the Estate of the Realm it was decided to send a delegation to Copenhagen.

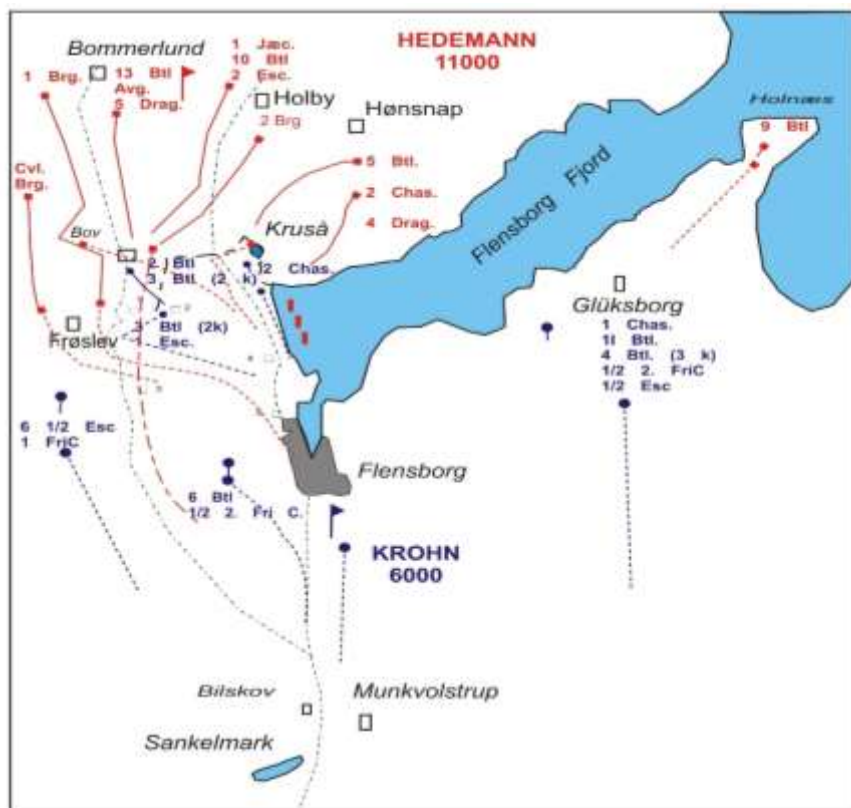
In a new meeting in Casino on March 20<sup>th</sup> the liberals of Copenhagen demanded a new government and a democratic constitution for the Kingdom and Schleswig. It was decided to send a deputation to Frederik VII the next day to deliver the demands. So the next day a big crowd assembled at the Copenhagen town hall square and at noon it moved towards the castle of Christiansborg.

The King had dismissed his Cabinet when the demonstration of the citizenry of Copenhagen reached the royal palace; they met the dismissed ministers on the way out of the palace. The King could therefore tell the delegation that their demands had been met. A new government was formed with representatives from both conservative and liberals with Count A. W. Moltke as Prime Minister.

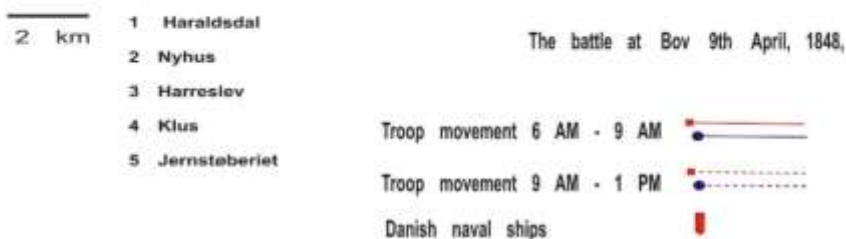
When the Schleswig Holstein delegation arrived in Copenhagen they negotiated with the new government without any results. With the rumours of what happened in Copenhagen, the Schleswig Holstein leaders assembled in Kiel on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. They agreed to form a provisional government for Schleswig Holstein called the "Statholders". On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March the Prince of Nör travelled to Rendsburg with a platoon of soldiers and citizens of Kiel. With a coup he succeeded to convince most of the garrison of Rendsburg to join the provisional government.

The rebellion in Schleswig Holstein was now a fact and on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1848 the Danish army marched into the Duchy of Schleswig.

### Some of the maps from the book

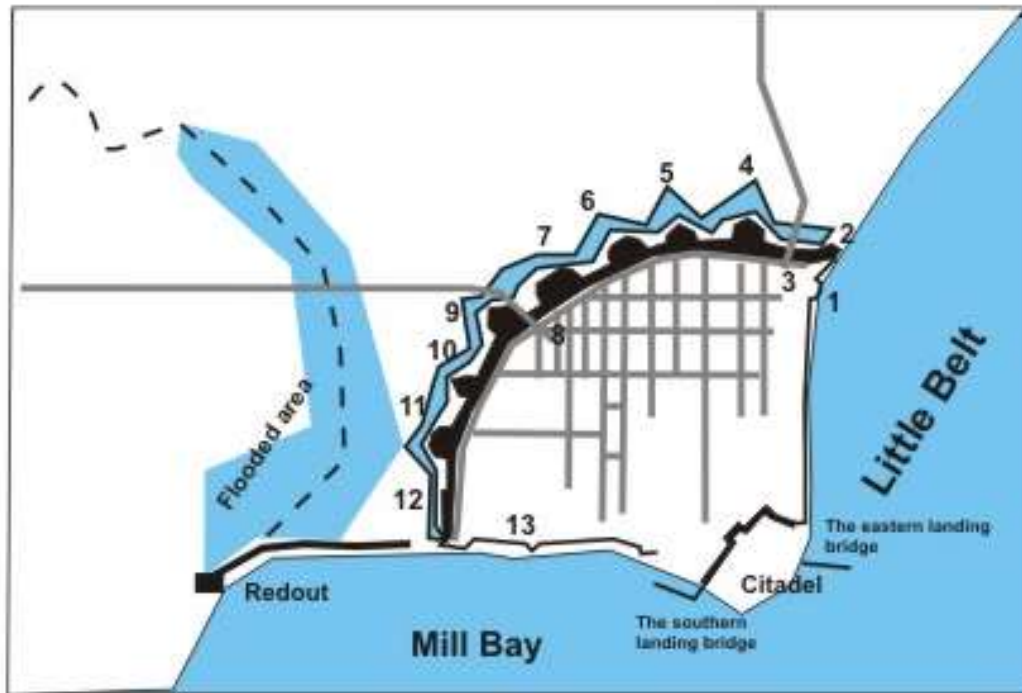


Map 4



Map 12

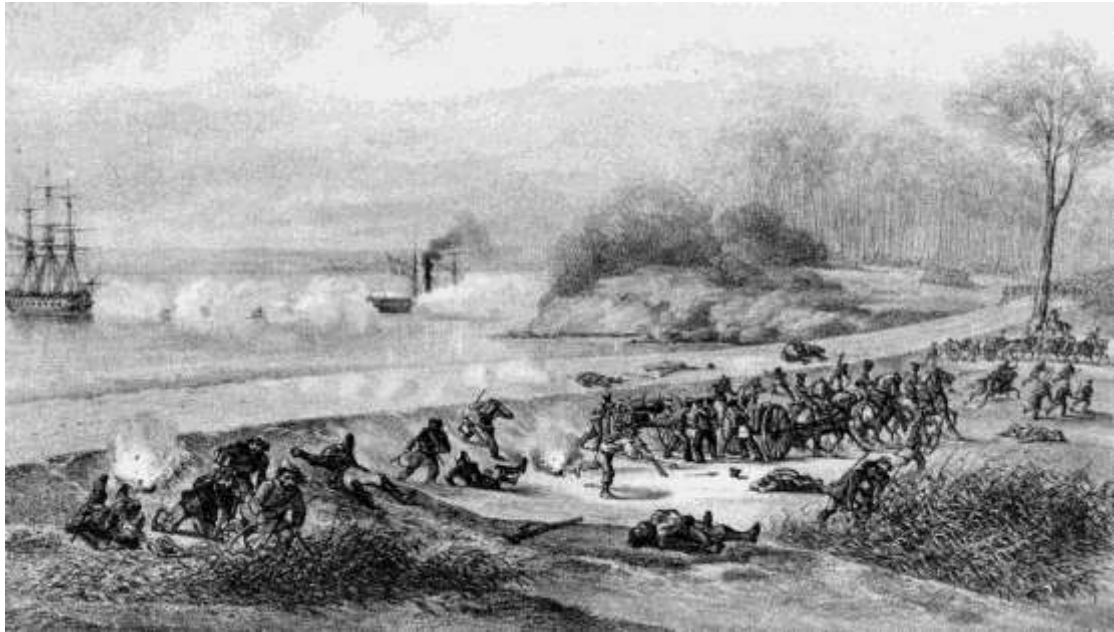
# FREDERICIA



1 km

- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Norway Bastion           | 7 Prins Georg's Bastion |
| 2 Denmark Bastion          | 8 Prins Gate            |
| 3 Kings gate               | 9 Prinses Bastion       |
| 4 Kings Bastion            | 10 Slesvig Bastion      |
| 5 Queens Bastion           | 11 Holsten Bastion      |
| 6 Prins Christians Bastion | 12 Oldenburg Bastion    |
|                            | 13 Delmenhorst Bastion  |

**Some of the illustrations**



**Figure 3.5 Bov 1848**



**Figure 5.2 Isted1850**