

## Review of James Falkner's "Prince Eugene of Savoy: A Genius for War Against Louis XIV and the Ottoman Empire"

CENGIZ ERGUN \*

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Modern World History and Mediterranean Studies, University of Szeged Dugonics Ter 13, 6720, Szeged, Hungary.*

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### Abstract

This review aims to evaluate various dimensions of James Falkner's recent work, *Prince Eugene of Savoy: A Genius for War Against Louis XIV and the Ottoman Empire*, first published in 2022. The book comprises 205 pages and is organized into twelve chapters, excluding the appendix and bibliography. Written in English, the work offers a chronologically structured account of Prince Eugene of Savoy's life and military career, with a particular focus on his campaigns against both the Ottoman Empire and France.

Drawing upon archival materials and scholarly research in military history, Falkner's objective is to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of Prince Eugene's strategic and political acumen. The book successfully contextualizes his military engagements within the broader political dynamics of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. As such, it serves as a valuable resource for researchers, academics, and students interested in the military history of early modern Europe, particularly in the context of Habsburg-Ottoman and Habsburg-French relations.

**Keywords:** Prince Eugene; Louis XIV; The Ottoman Empire; Habsburg; France; Turks

### 1. Introduction

James Falkner's *Prince Eugene of Savoy: A Genius for War Against Louis XIV and the Ottoman Empire* [1] offers a comprehensive and analytically rich account of one of the most prominent military and political figures of 17th- and 18th-century Europe. The book explores not only Prince Eugene's military campaigns, but also his diplomatic engagements and strategic influence in shaping the political dynamics of early modern Europe. Through detailed narrative and critical examination, Falkner illuminates the complex network of alliances, rivalries, and military decisions that defined Eugene's career and altered the European balance of power.

Born in Paris in 1663, Prince Eugene of Savoy was denied a military commission by King Louis XIV, prompting his relocation to the Habsburg court, where he quickly distinguished himself during the Siege of Vienna (1683). From these early experiences, Falkner traces Eugene's rise through the ranks of the Habsburg military, emphasizing key victories over both the Ottoman Empire and France. The book meticulously examines major engagements such as the Battle of Zenta (1697), his pivotal role in the War of the Spanish Succession, and his sustained campaigns against French forces. Falkner particularly highlights Eugene's strategic partnership with John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, culminating in the decisive Battle of Blenheim (1704)—a turning point in European military history.

\* Corresponding author: CENGIZ ERGUN

A notable strength of the book lies in its detailed treatment of Eugene's campaigns against the Ottoman Empire, spanning from the 1683 siege through the Austro-Ottoman War (1716–1718). Falkner not only analyzes the tactical dimensions of these conflicts but also evaluates their long-term political consequences, including the erosion of Ottoman influence in Europe. The author's use of extensive primary sources enhances the scholarly rigor of the work, offering nuanced insights into Eugene's decision-making processes, command style, and evolving role as both a military leader and statesman.

Structured chronologically, the book allows readers to trace the trajectory of Eugene's career, placing each campaign within its broader geopolitical context. Falkner's interdisciplinary approach—merging military history with diplomatic and political analysis—makes this work a valuable contribution to the historiography of early modern Europe. It serves as a critical resource for scholars, military historians, and readers interested in Habsburg-Ottoman relations, Franco-Habsburg rivalry, and the strategic transformations of the European state system in the early 18th century.

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## **2. The Chapters of the Book**

Falkner's book consists of twelve chapters. Beginning with Prince Eugene's entry into the service of Louis XIV, the chapters deal with Eugene's rising military career, his share in the victories over the French and Ottomans, and his political influence in the Habsburg Monarchy [1].

### **2.1. A Little Priest – Eugene and Louis XIV (Book Chapter 1)**

The opening section of James Falkner's *Prince Eugene of Savoy: A Genius for War Against Louis XIV and the Ottoman Empire* explores the early life and formative military experiences of Prince Eugene. Falkner situates Eugene's upbringing within the context of his noble yet politically turbulent family, noting the influence of his mother, Olympia Mancini, a prominent but controversial figure at the court of King Louis XIV. Despite familial expectations that he pursue an ecclesiastical career, Eugene was drawn instead to military service. However, his frail physique and perceived lack of suitability for warfare led Louis XIV to reject his request for a commission and to encourage him toward the clergy. This pivotal moment marked the beginning of Eugene's estrangement from France and eventual alignment with the Habsburg Monarchy.

In 1683, Eugene fled France and arrived in Vienna at a critical juncture—the Ottoman siege of the city. Falkner contextualizes this move within the broader Habsburg-French rivalry, illustrating how political dynamics of the period often redirected talent across enemy lines. Eugene was received by Emperor Leopold I, who granted him a position in the imperial army, offering him the opportunity to demonstrate his military aptitude.

The Siege of Vienna served as a turning point in Eugene's career. Falkner underscores the strategic importance of the siege for the future of Europe and emphasizes how Eugene's bravery, tactical insight, and leadership during the battle earned him early distinction and facilitated his rapid advancement within the Habsburg military hierarchy. Through this analysis, Falkner establishes the foundations of Eugene's transformation from a displaced French nobleman to one of the most celebrated military commanders in early modern European history.

### **2.2. Vienna – The Golden Apple (Book Chapter 2)**

This chapter focuses on Prince Eugene's ascent to military prominence following his entry into Habsburg service, particularly in the wake of the 1683 Siege of Vienna, which marked his first significant engagement on the European stage. James Falkner provides a detailed account of how Eugene's reputation evolved within the imperial military structure, establishing him as a formidable commander in the Ottoman-Habsburg conflicts.

The Siege of Vienna in 1683 posed an existential threat to the Habsburg Monarchy, as the Ottoman army, under the command of Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha and on the orders of Sultan Mehmed IV, launched an ambitious campaign to seize the imperial capital. During this critical moment, Eugene joined the Habsburg forces as a young officer, gaining his first direct experience in large-scale warfare. Falkner highlights Eugene's courage and discipline under pressure, which drew the attention of senior military leaders and positioned him for future advancement.

The successful defense of Vienna—achieved through the alliance between the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Poland, led by King John III Sobieski—was a turning point in European-Ottoman relations, significantly weakening Ottoman influence in Central Europe. Falkner asserts that Eugene's aggressive and tactically astute combat style during this campaign laid the foundation for his later recognition as a military genius.

Following the liberation of Vienna, the Habsburg military launched a series of offensives aimed at reclaiming Ottoman-held territories in the Balkans. Key victories such as the capture of Buda in 1686 and the Second Battle of Mohács in 1687 marked significant milestones in this counteroffensive. Eugene played a prominent role in these operations, particularly in pioneering swift and mobile cavalry tactics that proved effective against traditional Ottoman warfare strategies. Falkner provides a detailed analysis of Eugene's contributions to the siege of Buda and emphasizes his ability to adapt strategically to battlefield conditions, highlighting his crucial role in halting the Ottoman advance into Central Europe.

Through this chapter, Falkner establishes Prince Eugene as not only a rising star within the Habsburg military but also as a central figure in reshaping the military balance between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires in the late 17th century.

### **2.3. The Triumph of Zenta (Book Chapter 3)**

This chapter offers a detailed analysis of one of Prince Eugene of Savoy's most decisive military triumphs—the Battle of Zenta, fought on September 11, 1697. Falkner reconstructs the strategic and operational context preceding the engagement, examining the relative positions of the Ottoman and Habsburg forces and highlighting Eugene's exceptional military leadership and tactical ingenuity.

Following the 1683 Siege of Vienna, the Habsburg Monarchy launched a sustained counteroffensive aimed at reversing Ottoman territorial gains in Central Europe. By the late 1690s, however, the Ottoman Empire had regained considerable strength, particularly in and around Belgrade. Nevertheless, the determined policies of Emperor Leopold I enabled the Habsburgs to regain the initiative. In this critical context, Eugene was appointed commander-in-chief of the Habsburg army in 1697. Falkner emphasizes that Eugene swiftly addressed issues of military discipline and organizational inefficiency, thereby enhancing the army's readiness for renewed conflict.

During this time, Sultan Mustafa II assembled a large Ottoman force and advanced northward from Belgrade into Hungary. As the Ottoman army attempted to cross the Tisza River, Eugene executed a highly coordinated and surprise assault. According to Falkner, Eugene's effective use of military intelligence and his capacity to exploit the element of speed and timing allowed him to strike the Ottomans at their most vulnerable point—midway through a river crossing.

Eugene's most decisive tactical maneuver was a swift cavalry attack on the defenseless Ottoman forces at the riverbank. The Tisza River, situated directly behind the Ottoman lines, obstructed any potential retreat, amplifying confusion and disorder within the ranks. The Habsburg forces quickly neutralized Ottoman artillery and pinned down elite units such as the Janissaries and cavalry. Falkner reports that more than 20,000 Ottoman troops were killed or drowned during the battle, including the Grand Vizier and several senior commanders. The Habsburg army captured a significant portion of the Ottoman war treasury, along with the Sultan's seals and other valuable military assets.

The Battle of Zenta proved to be a watershed moment in Ottoman-Habsburg relations, delivering a decisive blow to Ottoman military capabilities in Europe. The outcome of the battle directly precipitated the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, which marked the beginning of sustained Ottoman territorial losses in Europe. Falkner underscores the significance of Zenta as a turning point that dismantled Ottoman military superiority and solidified the Habsburg Monarchy's position as a dominant European power.

The chapter also explores the immediate aftermath of the victory, noting that Eugene was celebrated as a national hero within the Habsburg realm. Falkner asserts that this triumph not only elevated Eugene's status within imperial circles but also cemented his legacy in European military history, providing him with both prestige and strategic experience that would prove instrumental in his subsequent campaigns against France.

### **2.4. A Death in Spain (Book Chapter 4)**

This chapter focuses on the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession and the significant role played by Prince Eugene of Savoy in shaping the early course of the conflict. James Falkner offers a thorough analysis of the geopolitical tensions that preceded the war, the succession crisis triggered by the death of King Carlos II of Spain, and Eugene's strategic military contributions, particularly in the Italian theatre.

The death of Carlos II in 1700, who died without an heir, created a major succession crisis across Europe. In his will, the Spanish king bequeathed his entire empire to Philippe, Duke of Anjou, the grandson of King Louis XIV of France. This act threatened to dramatically expand French influence and posed a direct challenge to the Habsburg dynasty's claims to the Spanish throne. In response, Emperor Leopold I asserted that the Spanish crown rightfully belonged to his own

house and declared his son, Archduke Karl, as the legitimate heir. The succession dispute quickly escalated into a broader European conflict, pitting two rival claimants and opposing alliances—France and Spain on one side, and Austria, England, and the Dutch Republic on the other.

In 1701, Prince Eugene was appointed commander of the Imperial army in Northern Italy, a strategically vital region due to its control over the Duchy of Milan, which held significant geopolitical weight in Mediterranean affairs. Falkner provides a detailed account of Eugene's early military maneuvers, which reflected his hallmark use of surprise tactics and rapid mobility. Rather than seeking direct confrontation with the French, Eugene opted to disrupt enemy supply lines and weaken their operational capacity. His victories at the Battle of Carpi and the Battle of Chiari in 1701 demonstrated both his tactical brilliance and his ability to unsettle a numerically superior opponent.

One of the most daring episodes described in this chapter is Eugene's surprise night assault on the city of Cremona in early 1702. Falkner underscores the military complexity and strategic boldness of the operation, during which Eugene's forces infiltrated the city via a concealed water channel and succeeded in capturing François de Neufville, Duke of Villeroy, a high-ranking French commander. Although the French garrison quickly regrouped and expelled the Habsburg troops before a full victory could be secured, the raid caused significant alarm in France and further enhanced Eugene's reputation for military innovation and audacity.

Later in 1702, Eugene engaged the Duke of Vendôme, one of France's most capable commanders, at the Battle of Luzzara. Falkner describes this encounter as a tactically demanding engagement, in which Eugene's forces, though outnumbered, managed to hold their ground against superior French strength. While the battle did not result in a decisive victory for either side, Eugene's leadership, discipline, and strategic acumen reinforced the Habsburg military presence in Northern Italy and effectively checked further French advances.

Overall, this chapter illustrates Eugene's emergence as a central figure in the Habsburg war effort, demonstrating his capacity to adapt to different theatres of war and outmaneuver experienced French commanders through a combination of tactical ingenuity and operational boldness.

## **2.5. President of the Imperial War Council (Book Chapter 5)**

A significant transformation occurred in Prince Eugene of Savoy's career in 1703, marking the beginning of a new phase in which he emerged not only as a distinguished military commander, but also as one of the chief architects of Habsburg war strategy. His appointment as President of the Imperial War Council (Hofkriegsrat) signaled a profound level of trust in his political judgment, administrative capabilities, and strategic foresight.

Up to that point, Eugene had repeatedly observed the institutional inefficiencies within the Viennese military administration. The Habsburg war effort had been hindered by an increasingly bureaucratic and disorganized structure, marked by ineffective war planning, irregular financial management, and supply chain breakdowns. As President of the War Council, Eugene was now in a position to address these issues directly. However, his challenges extended beyond the battlefield; he also had to navigate a conservative and self-interested bureaucratic elite entrenched in imperial decision-making.

One of Eugene's first priorities was to resolve the logistical and financial crisis that plagued the Austrian military. Prolonged warfare had strained the imperial treasury, resulting in delayed wages, widespread corruption, and a severely dysfunctional supply system. Eugene swiftly imposed strict oversight on military expenditures and dismissed several officials who had enriched themselves through bribery and mismanagement. By doing so, he aimed to ensure that troops in the field were no longer disadvantaged due to logistical failures.

In addition to administrative reforms, Eugene introduced structural changes to the army, particularly by enhancing the role and mobility of cavalry units. He emphasized tactical flexibility, tailoring the army's strategies to more effectively counter both Ottoman and French military doctrines. According to Falkner, these reforms were instrumental in transforming the Austrian army into a more disciplined, adaptable, and effective fighting force, which would ultimately underpin its military successes in the decades to follow.

Nevertheless, Eugene's reform efforts met significant resistance from the traditional aristocracy and clerical elite that dominated the Habsburg administrative apparatus. Many of these individuals, despite lacking military expertise, held considerable sway over imperial policy. Eugene openly challenged this system, advocating that military strategy should be shaped by experienced professionals, not by politically influential amateurs. Although opposition persisted, Eugene's continued success on the battlefield provided him with the political leverage needed to implement meaningful change.

Complicating his efforts further were internal political tensions within the empire. The most pressing of these was the defection of Elector Max Emmanuel of Bavaria to the French side, a development that posed a serious threat to Austria's internal stability. In response, Eugene prioritized the strategic reorganization of the army, increasing its mobility and ensuring that Austria could manage simultaneous conflicts on multiple fronts.

The reforms that Eugene instituted as head of the Imperial War Council laid the foundation for Austria's rise as a leading military power in Europe. His efforts to streamline the war economy, combat bureaucratic inertia, and instill discipline and efficiency within the armed forces contributed significantly to Austria's long-term advantage over both France and the Ottoman Empire.

As Falkner emphasizes, this period marked Eugene's evolution from a military commander into a statesman of the highest caliber. No longer confined to the battlefield, he emerged as a central figure in both diplomatic negotiations and administrative reform, shaping the strategic direction of the Habsburg Monarchy during a pivotal era in European history.

## **2.6. The Two Princes – Blenheim (Book Chapter 6)**

The year 1704 marked a defining moment in European military history with the Battle of Blenheim, a confrontation widely regarded as one of the most significant engagements of the War of the Spanish Succession. This battle fundamentally disrupted France's dominance in Europe and played a pivotal role in altering the strategic fortunes of the Habsburg Monarchy. At the center of this historic victory stood Prince Eugene of Savoy, who—alongside John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, the famed English commander—secured a decisive triumph over the combined Franco-Bavarian forces.

By 1704, the war had reached a critical juncture for Austria. The Elector of Bavaria, Max Emmanuel, in alliance with France, posed an immediate threat to Vienna, with plans to cross the Danube and strike deep into Habsburg territory. Recognizing the strategic danger this posed, Prince Eugene understood that Austria, facing military and financial constraints, could not repel such an offensive alone. It was at this crucial point that the support of England and the Dutch Republic became indispensable. Marlborough, committed to weakening French hegemony, sought a reliable partner to carry out a major continental campaign—an objective that found its perfect complement in Eugene's leadership.

Though different in temperament and command style—Eugene being disciplined, swift, and bold, and Marlborough patient, calculating, and diplomatic—the two generals forged one of the most effective military alliances in European history. Marlborough's daring march from England to the Netherlands and through Germany, designed to secure support from the German principalities and coordinate with Habsburg forces, is lauded by Falkner as a strategic masterstroke that caught the French by surprise. Meanwhile, Eugene managed to stabilize the situation in Italy before joining Marlborough along the Danube, where they prepared to confront the advancing army of Marshal Tallard and the Bavarian forces.

The Battle of Blenheim commenced on 13 August 1704, near the village of Blenheim (Blindheim), where an Allied force of approximately 52,000 troops—comprising English, Dutch, Austrian, and German soldiers—faced off against a Franco-Bavarian army of 56,000. Marlborough commanded the center of the line, while Eugene was tasked with leading the right flank. His objective was to engage and pin down Tallard's right wing, thereby preventing reinforcements from threatening the Allied center. Despite the French occupying strong defensive positions and the Bavarians demonstrating considerable tactical organization, Eugene executed a series of coordinated and persistent assaults throughout the day, sustaining pressure on the enemy lines.

Though faced with fierce resistance and heavy casualties, Eugene's unwavering leadership and his confidence in his troops enabled him to hold the line and prevent a breakthrough. This allowed Marlborough to launch a sudden and concentrated assault on the French center, ultimately breaching their defenses. As the day progressed, the French army collapsed, with Marshal Tallard captured, 14,000 French soldiers killed, and over 11,000 taken prisoner. The scale of the defeat shattered the myth of Louis XIV's military invincibility, marking a dramatic reversal in French fortunes.

The implications of the victory at Blenheim were both military and diplomatic. Bavaria's alliance with France suffered a severe setback, and the immediate threat to Austrian security was neutralized. Falkner emphasizes that the battle not only shifted the military momentum in favor of the Allies but also altered the broader diplomatic landscape, curbing

France's ability to act unilaterally in European affairs. It simultaneously elevated Austria's position in the war and reinforced the strategic partnership between Eugene and Marlborough as one of the most consequential alliances in the history of early modern warfare.

### **2.7. Two Cousins – The Victory at Turin (Book Chapter 7)**

By 1706, the War of the Spanish Succession had escalated into a fully continental conflict, with major battles unfolding across multiple theaters. A central focus of the French campaign was the Duchy of Savoy, which they sought to dominate in order to consolidate their control over Northern Italy. Such a development posed a direct threat to Habsburg strategic interests, as the fall of Savoy would effectively undermine Austria's presence in the region.

Amidst these shifting alliances, Duke Victor-Amadeus II of Savoy severed his ties with France and aligned himself with the Austrian-led Grand Alliance. This defection, however, provoked a swift and forceful French response. In May 1706, French forces under the command of Marshal La Feuillade laid siege to Turin, Savoy's capital. With approximately 44,000 troops, the French encircled the city, placing Victor-Amadeus, whose defensive resources were severely limited, under immense pressure. Without immediate support from his new allies, the city's fall appeared imminent.

Recognizing the strategic gravity of the situation, Prince Eugene of Savoy resolved to intervene. The loss of Turin would have signaled the collapse of Habsburg influence in Italy and handed France a significant advantage in the broader war. Yet Eugene faced a formidable challenge: his army numbered just 30,000 men, significantly fewer than the besieging French forces, and he would need to conduct a hazardous and covert march through hostile territory to reach the city.

Eugene's march to Turin is rightly remembered as a logistical and strategic masterpiece. Traversing hundreds of kilometers, he successfully navigated mountain passes, enemy patrols, and French fortifications, ultimately arriving unexpectedly near Turin—a feat made possible through calculated deception. To further mislead the enemy, Eugene launched feint attacks around Milan and Pavia, drawing French attention away from his actual movements. Falkner notes that French intelligence failed to detect the maneuver, allowing Eugene to approach Turin unopposed and rendezvous with Victor-Amadeus, his cousin and co-commander.

Together, the two leaders devised a bold plan to break the siege. On 7 September 1706, the Austro-Savoyard forces launched a three-pronged assault on the French positions surrounding the city. Eugene commanded the right wing, while Victor-Amadeus led the left. Although the French initially mounted a robust defense, Eugene's forces succeeded in piercing the center of the French lines, initiating a brutal close-quarters engagement. Falkner emphasizes Eugene's use of aggressive and relentless tactics, which rapidly demoralized the French command. As Eugene's troops surged into the French trenches, panic ensued, culminating in the complete collapse of Feuillade's army. Within three hours, the siege was lifted, and the French forces were routed, suffering heavy losses and abandoning their positions around the city.

The Battle of Turin was among the most devastating defeats suffered by France during the War of the Spanish Succession. It marked the beginning of the decline of French dominance in Italy, securing for Austria a decisive strategic advantage in the region. The victory also had far-reaching diplomatic consequences, significantly altering the balance of power in Europe. Falkner underscores that Eugene's success at Turin not only affirmed his status as a military genius, but also highlighted his mastery of strategic planning, operational deception, and coalition warfare. Following this triumph, Prince Eugene was widely recognized as one of Europe's preeminent military leaders, a reputation that would endure for the remainder of his career.

### **2.8. An Uncertain Business – Toulon (Book Chapter 8)**

By 1707, France's superiority in the War of the Spanish Succession had begun to wane. The victories of Prince Eugene, especially the Battle of Blenheim in 1704 and the Battle of Turin in 1706, had caused France to struggle in the war. However, Louis XIV was still strong and France maintained its superiority, especially in the Mediterranean. Austria and its allies aimed to destroy the French navy and end the war quickly by capturing Toulon, France's most important naval base in the Mediterranean. Prince Eugene was assigned as the land force commander for this operation. However, this campaign would not be as decisive as Eugene's previous victories.

Toulon was France's most important port and naval base in the Mediterranean. If the Allies could capture it, France's naval power would be greatly weakened, its mobility in the War of the Spanish Succession would be restricted, and the supremacy of England and the Netherlands in the Mediterranean would be assured. The Allies' plan was for the English and Dutch navies to attack Toulon by sea, while the Austrian and Savoy armies would attack by land. Prince Eugene was

appointed as the land commander of this major operation, while Marlborough continued to control the front in Western Europe. However, this operation carried many risks:

- France had strong defenses.
- Its supply lines were long and precarious.
- If the attack failed, the Allies would be forced to retreat with great losses.

Eugene set out from Italy for Toulon with Duke Victor-Amadeus of Savoy. The army, which had entered French territory with 30,000 men, had to advance through mountainous and difficult terrain. The troops encountered French resistance along the way, and fought small skirmishes repeatedly. Falkner emphasizes that Eugene displayed extraordinary discipline and planning throughout the campaign. He carefully managed his supply lines, set up defenses against French attacks, and coordinated with the Allies. However, as they approached Toulon, resistance increased and the French army began to prepare for a major defense. When Eugene and Victor-Amadeus reached Toulon in July 1707, they realized that the French defenses were stronger than they had expected. The city was surrounded by walls and the French navy was ready to defend on the open sea. Despite this, the Allies began to besiege the city. While the English and Dutch navies bombarded from the sea, Eugene's army advanced by land. The first few attacks were successful and the Allies broke through the French defenses and advanced inland. However, two major problems arose here:

- The French put up a stubborn defense. French forces under General René de Froulay, Comte de Tessé, launched a massive counterattack to halt the Allied advance. Eugene's army encountered unexpected resistance and fierce street fighting broke out.
- Supply and logistics problems grew. The Allied army was tired after a long march and did not have enough resources to besiege a major port like Toulon. The French logistical advantage in the region made things difficult for the Allies.

Eugene and Victor-Amadeus tried to continue the siege, but the French were constantly receiving reinforcements. As a result, the Allied army decided to retreat in August 1707. The Toulon Campaign was a disappointing outcome for the Allies, although not a decisive defeat. Falkner describes how despite Eugene's extraordinary efforts, logistical and strategic disadvantages led to the failure of the campaign, but this retreat did not undermine Eugene's military reputation because the French army suffered heavy losses and the navy was severely damaged. The Allies continued to press the southern borders of France. Eugene and Victor-Amadeus managed to save their armies during the retreat without suffering major losses. Therefore, the Toulon Campaign should not be considered a complete defeat, but a strategic failure.

Falkner describes the Toulon Campaign as one of Eugene's toughest tests. His military acumen and leadership allowed him to minimize the army's losses and greatly weakened the French navy. However, France's excellent defensive strategy and logistic advantage prevented the Allies from achieving their goals.

Although this campaign may seem like one of the biggest failures of Eugene's career, it once again demonstrated his battlefield skills and crisis management skills. If Toulon had been captured, the War of the Spanish Succession would probably have ended sooner and France would have suffered a much greater strategic blow. However, the war continued and Eugene's next great test would come on French soil.

## **2.9. The Great Campaign – Oudenarde and Lille (Book Chapter 9)**

By 1708, the balance of power in the War of the Spanish Succession had begun to tip in favor of the Allies. The great victories won by Prince Eugene and Marlborough had forced France to defend itself. However, Louis XIV was still resisting. In order to gain a decisive advantage over France, the Allies aimed to advance along the Rhine, occupy French territory and reach Paris. For this aim, they needed to break the most critical defense line in eastern France. Prince Eugene and Marlborough joined forces once again and became the leaders of this great operation. However, they were faced by one of France's most experienced commanders, Marshal Villars.

Eugene and Marlborough meticulously prepared their plans. The aim was to advance along the Rhine, break through France's defense line and reach its heart directly. Their first goal was to capture Bruges and Ghent in the north and control Flanders. With this move, the Allies managed to leave France's eastern borders even more vulnerable. Louis XIV panicked and ordered Marshal Villars to quickly reposition his armies along the Rhine. However, the Allies would make another move that would put the French in an even more difficult position: the siege of Lille.

Lille was one of the strongest strongholds in northeastern France, and Louis XIV did not want to lose it. The French defenses were protected by a strong garrison under Marshal Boufflers. If the Allies could take Lille, the eastern borders

of France would be completely opened. Eugene and Marlborough began the siege of Lille in September 1708. During the siege, Eugene led the direct attacks; Marlborough provided logistical support, and the French resisted until the last drop of their blood. The battle continued for weeks. The French defenses proved tougher than expected. However, the Allies gradually weakened the garrison by strategically cutting off supplies and ammunition. In November 1708, Lille fell and France suffered a major blow.

The loss of Lille was a shock to France. However, Louis XIV did not give up. Marshal Villars strengthened the defenses along the Rhine to stop the Allies and devised a plan to slow the Allied advance:

- Extend the Allied supply lines by drawing the defenses directly to Paris,
- Delay their advance by destroying critical bridges and roads,
- Concentrate the French army at a single point and stop the Allies in a war of attrition.

Villars focused on defending the entire eastern borders of France, and advances for the Allies became increasingly difficult. Eugene knew Villars would resist, but he did not expect such a resilient defense.

## **2.10. An Empire of Shadows – Malplaquet, Denain and Peace (Book Chapter 10)**

By 1709, the War of the Spanish Succession had entered its most critical phase. The cumulative successes of Prince Eugene of Savoy and John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim, Turin, and Lille had severely constrained French military options. Though Louis XIV could no longer hope for a full reversal of fortunes, he remained determined to prevent a total collapse of French power. In this context, the Battle of Malplaquet emerged as a final and desperate effort to halt the Allied advance—one that would prove to be among the bloodiest and most fiercely contested battles of the entire conflict.

Intent on delivering a decisive blow to France, Eugene and Marlborough aimed to push directly toward Paris, and to do so, they targeted the fortified city of Mons, a strategically vital stronghold in northeastern France. The fall of Mons would open a direct corridor to the French interior. Recognizing the gravity of the threat, Louis XIV dispatched Marshal Claude de Villars to defend the city and delay the Allied advance. The confrontation at Malplaquet, just outside Mons, thus became a defining moment in the war: if the Allies prevailed, French resistance could collapse; if the French held, the war would be prolonged.

Upon discovering that Villars had entrenched his forces in the forested region of Malplaquet, Eugene and Marlborough agreed that a full engagement was necessary. On September 9, 1709, the Allied forces—comprising Austrian, English, Dutch, and German troops—moved into position. Villars had skillfully exploited the natural terrain to establish a deep and heavily fortified defensive line, integrating forests, trenches, artillery positions, and barricades to blunt the Allied assault. French reinforcements further strengthened these positions, ensuring that any attack would come at an immense cost.

The battle commenced on the morning of September 11, 1709. Marlborough led the central assault, but his troops were repeatedly repelled by Villars' defensive works. The Anglo-Dutch forces suffered particularly heavy casualties in the early hours. On the right flank, Eugene spearheaded an aggressive attack with Austrian and German troops, seeking to encircle the French and break their line. The most intense and bloody fighting occurred during this phase, as the Allies launched wave after wave of frontal assaults, only to be met with fierce resistance.

Despite the formidable French defenses, the tide began to turn as the battle wore on. Eugene, demonstrating exceptional tactical adaptability, concentrated his forces and eventually succeeded in breaching a critical segment of the French line. As the Allied pressure intensified, Marshal Villars was seriously wounded, contributing to the disarray and eventual retreat of the French forces. By the afternoon, the Allies had secured the battlefield and taken Mons, but the victory came at an enormous cost.

As Falkner highlights, the Battle of Malplaquet is remembered as one of the deadliest engagements in early modern European warfare. The Allies sustained over 20,000 casualties, while French losses were estimated at approximately 12,000. Though the Allies succeeded in capturing Mons and pushing further into France, their forces were so exhausted and depleted that they were unable to advance toward Paris, effectively halting the campaign's momentum.

Historians have often classified Malplaquet as a "Pyrrhic victory": a tactical success overshadowed by the devastating cost to the victors. Eugene and Marlborough had achieved a battlefield triumph, yet they had failed to destroy French resistance or bring the war to a swift conclusion. Falkner regards Malplaquet as one of the most challenging and sobering episodes of Eugene's military career—one that reinforced his reputation for courage and leadership, but also



revealed the limits of military power in the face of determined opposition. For Eugene, it was a bittersweet victory, emblematic of the brutal realities of warfare and a reminder that France, though wounded, remained unbroken.

- The Battle of Denain: Eugene's Greatest Defeat on the Western Front

Following his victories over the Ottomans, Eugene returned to the French front. However, this time the situation of the allies was more complicated. Anti-war views in England had grown stronger, Marlborough had been dismissed, and the military support of the allies had diminished.

In 1712, French Marshal Villars launched a major attack on the allies at Denain. Eugene tried to organize the allied army, but England was no longer taking an active role in the war; the French had established a good defensive line and the allies' morale was low and there was no harmony between the troops.

The allies suffered heavy losses at the Battle of Denain, and Eugene was forced to retreat. This defeat put France in a stronger position in the peace negotiations.

- The Treaties of Utrecht and Rastatt: The End of the War

Following the defeat at Denain, the allies began diplomatic talks with France. In 1713, England stayed out of the war by signing the Treaty of Utrecht with France.

Although Austria wanted to continue fighting against France, the war officially ended with the Treaty of Rastatt in 1714. Eugene tried to protect Austria's interests in these negotiations, and the Habsburgs gained some important territorial gains.

## **2.11. Warlord – Peterwardein and Belgrade (Book Chapter 11)**

In this chapter, James Falkner analyzes Prince Eugene of Savoy's final major military engagements against the Ottoman Empire—the Battle of Peterwardein (Petrovaradin - 1716) and the Siege of Belgrade (1717). These campaigns, Falkner argues, were decisive in securing Habsburg dominance in the Balkans and marked the irreversible decline of Ottoman influence in Europe.

By 1716, the Ottoman Empire had mobilized a substantial force under Grand Vizier Damad Ali Pasha—estimated at nearly 100,000 troops—with the objective of reclaiming the Banat region, a strategically vital area straddling the modern borders of Romania, Serbia, and Hungary. In response, Eugene advanced to intercept the Ottoman army and established defensive positions near Petrovaradin. When the Ottoman forces arrived, Eugene strategically withdrew to a more advantageous location. On the morning of August 5, 1716, the Ottomans commenced their assault, initiating the battle with intense artillery bombardment. Eugene countered by dispersing his formations, minimizing the impact of the Ottoman fire.

In the afternoon, Eugene launched a well-coordinated counteroffensive, directing his cavalry against the flanks and rear of the Ottoman lines, effectively splitting the army in two and creating confusion. The Ottoman forces descended into chaos, and Grand Vizier Damad Ali Pasha was killed in action. The result was a crushing defeat for the Ottomans—one of the most significant in their long-standing conflict with the Habsburgs. Seizing the momentum, Eugene turned his attention to a more ambitious objective: the capture of Belgrade.

The Siege of Belgrade (1717) represented one of Eugene's most challenging undertakings. Belgrade, a critical Ottoman stronghold, was fortified by the Danube and Sava rivers, defended by robust walls, and garrisoned by approximately 30,000 troops. In July 1717, Eugene initiated the siege. However, a new threat emerged: an Ottoman relief force was advancing up the Danube to lift the siege.

On August 16, 1717, the Ottoman army launched a major offensive aimed at breaking the siege by splitting Eugene's forces. The cavalry and Janissaries mounted a direct assault on the Austrian lines, seeking to disrupt the encirclement. Eugene, however, responded with a masterful tactical maneuver. First, he softened the Ottoman infantry with concentrated artillery fire, then employed his cavalry in a flanking operation that encircled and routed the Ottoman forces. The Ottoman army collapsed, and shortly thereafter, Belgrade capitulated.

The fall of Belgrade dealt a severe blow to the Ottoman Empire's military prestige. Defeated and weakened, the Ottomans entered into peace negotiations, culminating in the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718). Under its terms, the

Ottoman Empire ceded the Banat, Belgrade, and much of Northern Serbia to the Habsburg Monarchy, marking a significant territorial and symbolic loss.

Falkner underscores that Eugene's triumph in this campaign signaled the end of Ottoman supremacy in Europe and firmly established the Habsburgs as the dominant power in the Balkans. The Belgrade campaign is widely regarded as Eugene's crowning military achievement, cementing his status among the most accomplished commanders in European history. His strategic foresight, operational flexibility, and battlefield leadership in these engagements are portrayed as exemplars of military excellence.

This section of the book, therefore, chronicles the culmination of Eugene's military career, illustrating how his victories at Petrovaradin and Belgrade not only halted the Ottoman advance but also redrew the geopolitical boundaries of Southeastern Europe. According to Falkner, these campaigns showcase Eugene's tactical brilliance and continue to serve as case studies in European military doctrine, representing the zenith of Habsburg martial power and the definitive decline of Ottoman influence in the region.

### **2.12. The Noble Knight / Der Erdle Ritter (Book Chapter 12)**

This chapter examines the final phase of Prince Eugene of Savoy's career, focusing on the political and diplomatic challenges he faced in the aftermath of the Ottoman wars and the War of the Spanish Succession. As the European balance of power shifted, a new arena of conflict emerged, particularly involving the growing rivalry between Austria and Spain. Although the war with France had formally concluded, tensions persisted, especially regarding Austria's claims in Italy.

Emperor Charles VI, determined to consolidate Austria's influence in the Italian Peninsula, insisted that he would only renounce his claim to the Spanish throne in exchange for enhanced territorial control in Italy. This stance was complicated by the ambitious foreign policy of Elizabeth Farnese, the second wife of King Felipe V of Spain, whose dynastic ambitions fueled Spain's renewed expansionist activities.

In the summer of 1717, Spain invaded Sardinia, exposing Austria's strategic vulnerability and raising concerns about the empire's ability to sustain military operations on multiple fronts. With peace negotiations still ongoing with the Ottoman Empire, Eugene cautioned against dividing resources, warning that Austria lacked the capacity to reclaim Sardinia without broader international support. His warnings were largely ignored by pro-Spanish factions within the Viennese bureaucracy, who underestimated the risks of overextension.

Later that year, France and England pressured Emperor Charles VI to relinquish his Spanish claims in exchange for a diplomatic compromise: Sicily would be ceded to Austria, while Sardinia would go to Savoy. Although this arrangement temporarily stabilized the situation, it deepened uncertainty over the long-term future of the Spanish succession. The legitimacy of Maria Theresa, Charles VI's daughter, as heir to the Habsburg domains hinged on the Pragmatic Sanction, a legal instrument whose acceptance by Europe's major powers remained uncertain.

Despite his illustrious military career, Eugene increasingly found himself entangled in court politics and bureaucratic resistance. Pro-Spanish elements within the imperial administration sought to marginalize his influence, employing political intrigue to prevent him from exerting control over policy. While Eugene retained some authority through his diplomatic skill and military prestige, Austria's growing diplomatic isolation, particularly due to the evolving Anglo-French alignment, gradually weakened his position within the Habsburg decision-making apparatus.

In sum, this chapter highlights how Prince Eugene's final years were defined less by military campaigns and more by the complex interplay of dynastic politics, international diplomacy, and internal court rivalries. Although his influence endured, the shifting geopolitical context and the fragmentation of support within the Habsburg administration constrained his ability to shape imperial strategy as decisively as in earlier decades.

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## **3. Conclusion**

James Falkner's Prince Eugene of Savoy stands as a significant contribution to both military history and European diplomatic studies, offering a comprehensive historical biography of one of the most influential military and political figures of early modern Europe. The work provides a detailed examination of Prince Eugene's battlefield strategies, his role in shaping European diplomacy, and his enduring impact on the continental balance of power.

Falkner meticulously analyzes Eugene's tactical innovations and the military reforms he implemented within the Austrian army, positioning him as a transformative figure in the evolution of Habsburg military strength. The book gives particular attention to pivotal battles such as Blenheim, Turin, Petrovaradin, and Belgrade, rendering it an invaluable resource for readers and scholars interested in the strategic dimensions of early 18th-century warfare. Beyond his military leadership, the author also explores Eugene's function as a diplomat and statesman, particularly in the context of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Austro-Ottoman conflicts, and subsequent peace negotiations that helped shape the political landscape of Europe.

While the biography offers a compelling and well-researched narrative, it tends to adopt a celebratory tone, often emphasizing Eugene's successes without equally rigorous engagement with alternative viewpoints. The perspectives of the Ottoman Empire, France, and Eugene's various allies and adversaries are not explored in comparable depth. In particular, the absence of insights derived from Ottoman archival materials and some other narratives [2] represents a missed opportunity to present a more balanced, multi-perspective account of the conflicts.

Moreover, the book's primary focus on military operations and high-level diplomacy comes at the expense of broader contextual analysis. Little attention is given to the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of the period. Topics such as the financing of military campaigns, logistical challenges faced by Eugene's armies, or the public perception of prolonged warfare are only briefly mentioned, if at all. Integrating these aspects could have enriched the narrative and provided a more holistic understanding of the era in which Eugene operated.

In sum, Prince Eugene of Savoy is a valuable and engaging work that successfully highlights the strategic and diplomatic accomplishments of its subject. However, a more multifaceted approach, incorporating alternative sources and perspectives, would have further enhanced its academic rigor and interpretive depth.

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### **Compliance with ethical standards**

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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