

# Famous Portraits Series

## Otto von Bismarck

Chancellor of the German Empire (1871-1990)

Born: 1 April 1815 Died: 30 July 1898 (Aged 83)



Bismarck as a young man in 1836 (aged 21)



Bismarck in 1848 as a member in the Frankfurt Parliament (aged 33)



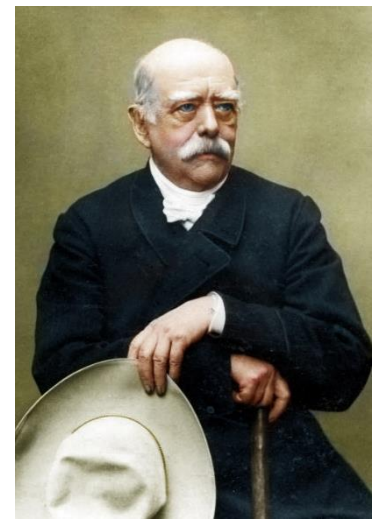
Bismarck in 1858 as Prussian Ambassador in St Petersburg, Russia (aged 43)



Bismarck in 1862 as Minister-President of Prussia (aged 47)  
*(Bundesarchiv)*



Bismarck in 1875 as Chancellor of the German Empire (aged 60)



Bismarck in 1890, the year of his retirement (aged 75)

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### Image credits:

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto\\_von\\_Bismarck#/media/File:Otto\\_von\\_Bismarck,\\_Jugendbildnis\\_im\\_Alter\\_von\\_22\\_Jahren.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck#/media/File:Otto_von_Bismarck,_Jugendbildnis_im_Alter_von_22_Jahren.jpg)
2. <https://neitshade5.wordpress.com/2015/04/02/otto-von-bismarck/>
3. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Otto%2Bvon%2Bbismarck.jpg>
4. <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/paintings/portrait-of-otto-von-bismarck-in-1870-photograph/>
5. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Otto\\_F%C3%BCrst\\_von\\_Bismarck.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Otto_F%C3%BCrst_von_Bismarck.JPG)
6. <https://loredanacrupi.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/otto-von-bismarck-bef-aft.jpg>

**Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck** was born in the same year that Napoleon was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo (June 1815). Bismarck inherited the attributes of his parents: his conservative mentality from his father and his intelligence and shrewdness from his mother. In adulthood, he learnt how to make use of these attributes to advance in his political career.

Bismarck's political career started by chance. In 1847 he was nominated to replace a sick member in the Prussian Parliament. He quickly made a name for himself as a staunch supporter for the King. This earned him influential positions as Prussian ambassador at St Petersburg (1859) and at Paris (1862). In 1862 the new Prussian King, William I, showed his trust in Bismarck by appointing him Minister-President of Prussia. From then onwards, Bismarck took control of the domestic and foreign policy of Prussia.

As Minister-President, and having grown up in the aftermath of the successful war against Napoleon and in a divided Germany, he knew that the German states would rally together when faced with foreign enemies. So when the opportunity came, he was shrewd enough to provoke wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870). All three victories gained Prussia admiration for its military strength and inspired a sense of common identity among the German people. Bismarck reached the apex of his political career with the declaration of the German Empire at the Palace of Versailles in 1871.

His policies as Imperial Chancellor were aimed at holding the newly-formed German Empire together in the face of religious, political and social divisions, while trying to maintain the fragile peace in Europe in the midst of rivalries between the European Great Powers. To this effect he devised an intricate web of defensive alliances among the Great Powers to ensure that Germany would not be involved in a war on two fronts.

His political career came to an end in 1890, when he resigned from Chancellor when Kaiser William II had just ascended the throne. In his retirement, Bismarck became an embittered man, seeing his successors allow the new German Emperor to take charge of foreign policy and committing blunders which increased tensions in Europe that threatened to undo all his achievements.

Bismarck is known in history for his political acumen; he was a good judge of character and knew whether threat, bribery, argument or flattery was required. Sharp-tongued, witty and eloquent, he knew how to reach the desired effect with almost any kind of audience.

#### **Further reading:**

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto\\_von\\_Bismarck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck)
- <https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/otto-von-bismarck-unification-germany-unify-biography-facts-how-prussian-politician/>
- <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/imperialism/notes/bismarck.html> <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/imperialism/notes/bismarck.html>

### **Questions**

1. How did Bismarck's childhood reflect his achievements in later life?
2. Explain in some detail Bismarck's position during the Prussian Revolution and the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848?
3. Identify and briefly elaborate on the FOUR turning points in Bismarck's political career from the 1850s onwards.
4. What, in your opinion was his greatest achievement and his greatest failure?
5. Compare and contrast Bismarck's working relationship with Emperor William I and his successor Kaiser William II?
6. Identify TWO domestic and TWO foreign policy issues which he had to deal with when he held the position of Imperial Chancellor between 1871 and 1890?
7. How did Bismarck spend his years in retirement after 1890?
8. Identify FOUR adjectives which best describe Bismarck's character and personality and give reasons for your answer.