

Ludendorff Defends the Exploitation Of Ukraine

Says Necessities of Germans Were Excuse for Actions That Caused Criticisms—Could Not Let Country Fall to Bolshevists

By GEN. ERICH VON LUDENDORFF

Today's installment concludes the publication of Ludendorff's book, "My Thoughts and Actions," with a chapter in which he endeavors to excuse the hard policy of German militarism in the Ukraine after the peace of Brest-Litovsk. The ruthless exploitation of this country by Germans, who often robbed and killed, was too much even for the Germans at home, and many voices were raised against the policies adopted. Ludendorff, as usual, gives the necessities of the German and people as his excuse for the woes inflicted on another people.

1918, continued their advance more slowly. Odessa had fallen on the 12th, after slight resistance. In this operation German troops, who had advanced through Moldavia after the conclusion of the preliminary peace with Rumania on March 7, had co-operated. In the succeeding period G. H. Q. had to bear in mind the objects for which the occupation of the Ukraine had been undertaken and to carry the advance no further than those objects necessitated.

The Ukraine had asked for our help. We ourselves, and even more Austria and its army, needed grain; the country could not, therefore, be allowed to become a prey, and a source of strength, to bolshevism. We had to strengthen it sufficiently to enable it to be useful to us.

The principal grain district we had occupied after the capture of Charkoff on April 8. The commander-in-chief in the east now found that the railways could not be worked without the coal of the Donetz Basin (opposite the northeast corner of the Black Sea). No, willy-nilly, we had to agree to occupy this part of the Ukraine as well, and to advance our lines as far as Rostoff, which was reached at the beginning of May. In spite of this we were obliged at first to send very considerable quantities of coal from Germany to the Ukraine; this import, however, decreased when more coal was procurable locally.

Besides the railway, we also needed secure water transport from the Black Sea ports to Braila. The Russian Black Sea fleet had caused us difficulties at Odessa, Nicolaeff and Cherson. Which government it was under was doubtful; in any event, it did not carry out the conditions of the peace of Brest. In Sebastopol it would always be a danger to navigation; so at the end of April we occupied the Crimea. Part of the Russian fleet escaped to Novoross-

sisk. It was intended to make use of the ships captured in Sebastopol so far as we could provide crew for them. The occupation of an extensive territory had led to fresh conflicts with bolshevik bands and troops. In most cases they were driven off without trouble. After the advance was stopped the commander-in-chief in the east had agreed upon a line of demarcation with the soviet government.

It was significant of this government that it often accused our troops of not respecting this line, while we had reports from our commanders and officers that bolshevik bands had raided the territory which our troops were to protect. Unfortunately the foreign office appeared to believe bolshevik lies sooner than our statements.

After a good deal of discussion with the Austrian headquarters at Baden our respective spheres of interest in the Ukraine were settled. On this, the quartermaster general effected an agreement with Austria-Hungary, and the exploitation of the supplies was regulated. Afterward, however, in view of the way Austria-Hungary had been selling our supplies, this agreement had to be modified, so that we understood the collecting of supplies in the whole of the Ukraine and their distribution. This was only an expedient, unfortunately a necessary one, in order to establish a practical working system.

HAD A CONFUSED SYSTEM. The German military and civil authorities found ample scope for their activities. I followed everything with great attention, since general headquarters was principally interested in the result. Field Marshal von Eichhorn had taken over the army group at Kieff, the government was represented by Ambassador von Mumm. The collection of supplies was in the hands of the imperial office (Reichswirtschaftsamt).

A more confused and many-headed organization it was impossible to imagine. I found it was all due to Berlin's unfortunate attitude toward "militarism," as well as to its own "bureaucratism" and hidebound methods.

As was to be expected, the new government of the Ukraine had proved incapable either of settling the unrest in the country or of delivering grain to us. This government disappeared with the scene, and Hetman Skoropadski assumed control.

While at the end of April and early in May I was occupied with important work connected with the operations on the west, I received through the emperor's military cabinet a telegram from the imperial chancellor to the emperor, complaining in strong terms of the "militarist" attitude of the group headquarters at Kieff and requesting his majesty to remedy it. The military cabinet had informed the imperial chancellor that his majesty proposed that in the first instance the whole episode should be investigated by means of a joint inquiry by the authorities concerned.

DENIES MILITARISM'S FAULT. I looked forward to this with satisfaction, for I was firmly convinced that by probing the matter to the bottom, and eliminating all gossip and prejudice, we should once more find there was nothing in the whole affair. In this case we did not even reach the conference stage, for it was soon made clear that the field marshal and the ambassador had personally worked together. So, as it happened, "militarism" had had nothing to do with it.

What actually occurred was that during the course of events a general had dealt somewhat harshly with a former member of the government, whose conduct had betrayed a highly doubtful attitude toward German interests. But the whole business left a bitter taste behind. I only mention this incident because it was characteristic of the feeling in Berlin.

(The incident of which he makes light was the overturning of the Ukraine parliament and cabinet by German troops and the establishment of Skoropadski as dictator.)

They were always ready there to go against, instead of with, us. It was though more important to consider certain political interests than practical requirements, even though the latter, like Field Marshal von Eichhorn's care for agriculture, was of the greatest consequence to our subsistence. It was particularly regrettable that without hearing the other side, the war minister sided with the government.

SKOROPADSKI AIDED INVADERS. Hetman Skoropadski turned out to be a man with whom it was possible to work well. He was determined to maintain order in the country, and to meet us as far as possible. I made his acquaintance later and formed a very good impression of him. He was never superficial, but penetrated to the bottom of everything.

General headquarters could not be otherwise than satisfied with the change of government at Kieff, as it was favorable to the prosecution of the war. I anticipated being able to increase our armies and our food supply; and the raising of new military formations was actually commenced. This, of course, required time and brought us no immediate relief. The German troops that were in the Ukraine were urgently needed by the group for protection against the bolsheviks and securing the economic exploitation of the country. Whenever we wanted to reduce them it complained that they were not strong enough.

The imperial economic office pursued a peace-time policy in the Ukraine which anticipated a state of affairs that did not yet exist; to that no one could object, provided that with the more limited economic policy the purely military motive, for which I think was not thereby excluded. In its need Austria-Hungary had taken drastic measures, and although it did not get anything like what Count Czernin, early in February had stated to be necessary, the supplies it drew from the Ukraine, combined with our assistance, undoubtedly saved Austria and its army from starvation.

GREAT HELP FROM UKRAINE. Only the most urgent need, however, were satisfied, and even then we did not receive the bread grain and forage so urgently required to revive the strength of our people at home. Still, the Ukraine did help Germany. In the summer of 1918 it supplied us with meat, and thus the scanty meat ration we had was made possible without encroaching upon our own live stock reserves and those of the occupied territories.

The army was also able to get horses in great numbers; without them warfare would have been altogether impossible. For if Germany had been obliged to raise these horses our own agriculture would have been ruined. We also obtained from the Ukraine raw materials of all kinds.

The hope that the grain of the Ukraine would prove to be an economic weapon which would improve our position in regard to the neutrals, and would bring us that further economic alleviation which was so important for maintaining our warlike capacity, had soon to be abandoned.

By occupying the Ukraine we had considerably weakened the military policy of the soviet government. We also established connection with many representatives of nationalistic tendencies of Great Russia, such as the De Cosackos, whom we could have made use of to combat bolshevism if the government had agreed to do so.

TROOPS SENT TO FINLAND. On the Great Russian front of the commander-in-chief in the east, from the Pripet to the Gulf of Finland, no change had occurred since March 3. Finland had risen, and urgently required immediate help. Arms alone were not enough. The soviet government made no preparations to withdraw its troops from Finland. The moment when that country would receive assistance from England was approaching.

In order to prevent the formation of another eastern front, and to increase our military strength, we complied with Finland's request for troops. General von Mannerheim also supported the dispatch of German troops. He did not want them too soon, nor in too great strength, so that his Finns might have some fighting to do, and thereby gain confidence. Those were sound military ideas.

With the consent of the imperial government, of which we continued to assure ourselves, we first established an advanced base in the Aland Islands, because at that time it appeared necessary to land in the Gulf of Bothnia. As a short time before Sweden had also landed troops on the islands, we had to enter into special negotiations with that country, which proceeded without difficulty. Later on Sweden withdrew its troops and we ourselves abandoned the islands, soon after general headquarters had decided to land the expedition at Hango.

RED GUARDS DRIVEN OUT

Liaison with General von Mannerheim was maintained by Major Crantz, whom I had sent to the Finnish headquarters, where he settled with the German troops were to be employed. Co-operation with General von Mannerheim was always satisfactory, and marked by mutual confidence. The Baltic division had been formed at Danzig under General Count von der Goltz; it consisted of three battalions of Jager, three regiments of mounted rifles (Kavallerie-Schutzen) and a few batteries. It landed at Hango early in April, while General von Mannerheim with the Finnish white guards, who had been partly armed by us, was northwest of Tammerfors with his back to Wass. The Finnish Jager battalion had been sent to him. Being composed of picked men, it formed an excellent training school for the new Finnish officers.

While General von Mannerheim advanced via Tammerfors, the Baltic division moved northeast toward Tavastehus. In co-operation with the fleet, it occupied Helsingfors on the 13th of April, with a weak force; the commander-in-chief in the east landed a weak detachment under Colonel von Brandenstein at Lovisa and Kotka, east of Helsingfors. This detachment marched north in order to block the retreat of the red guards, who were near Tavastehus, at Lahti. In a concentric attack they were completely surrounded after heavy fighting at the end of April and forced to surrender. Finland was thus liberated.

ENGLAND COULD NOT ADVANCE

In the meantime Viborg had been occupied from the north by the white guards, and, as a result, this was a good move; what its actual result would have been, if the decision had not taken place further west, could not be foreseen, owing to the uncertain fighting value of the opposing forces and the support of the bolsheviks from Russia. The tactical victory and the prompt liberation of Finland were achieved on the field of Lahti-Tavastehus by the splendid collaboration of German and Finnish troops. This concluded operations.

We now held positions at Viborg and Narva which would at any time enable us to advance on Petrograd, in order to overthrow the bolshevik government or prevent the English from reaching there from Murmansk. From Finland, moreover, the Murmansk railway was flanked along its whole length, so that England could not undertake any serious attempt on Petrograd.

The English expedition which had occupied the Murman coast was firmly held there. The diversion of the weak Baltic division, of which the three Jager battalions returned to Germany in August, was well worth while. The Finnish government at once set about organizing the Finnish army, assisted by German instructors.

BALKED BY FOREIGN OFFICE

That we did not achieve more in Finland is mainly owing to our ever vacillating policy. General Count von der Goltz had won universal confidence, even that of the leading politicians, which the representative of the German government was not so successful in doing. The want of decision in our foreign policy was unfortunately made evident in this sphere also: The foreign office adopted no definite plan, and became nobody's friend in Finland, but only offended Germany's faithful adherents.

The many proofs of warm sympathy which I received from Finland after my resignation prove that gratitude still exists in the world. This sympathy touched me all the more because it

was not Finnish but purely German interests that took us there.

When in February, 1919, the Swedish government, for no reasons that I could understand, made difficulties about my staying there, a Finnish delegate suddenly appeared at Helsingborg to offer me an asylum in Finland. I was pleased, but of course refused, as I wanted to return to Germany.

Amazing revelations made by Ludendorff in his book will be reviewed tomorrow by Eugene J. Young, war editor of the New York World, who has handled and annotated the work for the American newspapers that have had the advantage of printing it. For those who wish to get a clear idea of the events of the war this review will be invaluable and well worth keeping.

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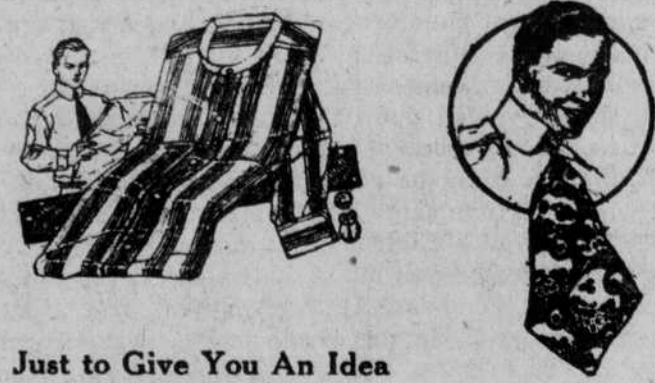
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