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THE YEAR IN WAR—LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

The Purposes and Achievements of the Allies and the Central Powers and Their Campaigns Compared.

Beginning of 1916 Sees Germany Fighting for Existence and No Chance of Peace on Practicable Terms.

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At the outset of any review of the military history of the year, it is essential to recall once more two things, which inevitably lose their proper place in the day-to-day comment on the war. To preserve a real perspective of the value and meaning of the various phases and campaigns of the war it is necessary to keep in mind the conditions of conflict, as fixed by the circumstances of the war at its outset, and the purpose, as contrasted with actual achievement, of the several campaigns.

Thus, in the matter of the conditions, the Great War wholly resembles the other coalition struggles of Europe, the wars in which other nations, with relatively weak allies, have undertaken to enforce their will, in a military sense—there is no intention of discussing here the political aspects—upon a group of nations collectively larger, richer and more powerful. Viewed from this angle there is nothing inherently different in this war from the Napoleonic struggle, and Germany is playing the part of France.

Now, in such a struggle it has always been true, and German military writers, notably Bernhardi, have always insisted upon it, that the single chance for victory lay in the crushing of the several foes forming the coalition against Germany, before all were able to put their maximum strength in the field. At the very least, they have argued that it was essential to crush one or two of the allied enemies to such an extent that they would be permanently crippled—that is, for the period of the war.

If one is to form any accurate estimate of the meaning of what has so far happened in this world conflict, it is only possible to do so by viewing the several campaigns that have taken place from this angle. To grasp the present state and the future prospects of the war it is imperative that the observer answer the question: How far has Germany succeeded in crushing any one of her foes? She has not eliminated any of the four great powers arrayed against her. Has she inflicted permanent injuries, which will cripple any one of these nations for the period of the war?

What Campaigns Mean.

This opens the discussion of the second point. German campaigns necessarily have been directed with the single purpose of destroying the military power of the nation attacked. Germany has concentrated her attention upon France, then upon Russia. She is now, it would seem, turning her attention toward Great Britain, aiming at the Egyptian province, with the patent purpose of cutting the line of communications which through Suez binds London with Bombay and Calcutta.

Now to take a parallel: In 1805 Napoleon, facing a European coalition, which included Russia, Great Britain and Austria, and was bound to include Prussia, as the present anti-German group in this war was sure to enlist Italy, had to solve the same military problem that faced the General Staff of the Kaiser in August, 1914.

Consider what he did. Breaking his camp at Boulogne, which he left in September, 1805, he swept into South Germany. October 20 he captured one Austrian army at Ulm. On December 2 he defeated the Russians and Austrians at Austerlitz, and on December 26 there was signed at Pressburg a treaty which eliminated Austria from the war. But Prussia now took the field, and a year later, on October 14, 1806, Napoleon utterly destroyed the Prussian armies at Jena and Auerstädt. The following June he completed the work by defeating the Russians at Friedland and the Peace of Tilsit, which followed, removed Russia and Prussia from the fighting line of his foes.

Between the capitulation of Ulm and the victory of Friedland there intervened nineteen months. On January 1 we shall be seventeen months away from the opening skirmishes of the present conflict. Roughly speaking, it is fair to compare the opening campaign of the Germans in France with the Napoleonic episode that culminated at Austerlitz. Again, there is the same parallel between the German operations in Russia and the Napoleonic campaign that succeeded at Jena. Finally the operations in the Balkans may recall the third Napoleonic effort that won Friedland and produced the Peace of Tilsit.

German Purpose.

German purpose, then, is patent. We know absolutely the reasons that moved the German General Staff to direct against the French in August, 1914, that human avalanche that swept through Belgium and came down to the Marne. It was a deliberate, calculated, supreme effort to dispose of France before Russia was ready and before Great Britain had begun to collect volunteers. It was precisely the same sort of military and strategic conception that Napoleon employed in the Austerlitz campaign.

But there was no Austerlitz. On the contrary, the German army was checked, flung back half the distance it had covered in France and pinned down to trenches from the sea to the Jura Mountains. France was *not* eliminated, crushed, seriously injured. Anglo-French losses were not greater than German. The strategic purpose of the Germans had been wholly thwarted. There was no Treaty of Pressburg, and Germany was not able to turn, unhampered, to deal with Russia, as Napoleon had been able to turn against Prussia.

The campaign of 1914, which, roughly speaking, stretches from August 1 to January 1, which includes the German successes in Belgium, Alsace-Lorraine and Northern France, and the Allied victories at the Marne and in Flanders, with the check and counter check at the Aisne, was from a military standpoint an unqualified failure. The German General Staff had missed its goal as utterly as Napoleon had achieved his in the Austerlitz campaign.

On the political side Germany had done better. She had occupied all of Belgium and 8,400 square miles of French territory. She still held advantageous positions, if she should be able later to resume her operations against France, having disposed of Russia. She also possessed in French and Belgian territory industrial and mineral regions of immediate value and territory which she could use as the basis for bargaining, if the war should turn out to be a draw and peace should come, not by a decision of the battlefield, as in the Napoleonic time, but from exhaustion, as in the Wars of Louis XIV.

But it is essential to recognize that the opening campaign of Germany was a complete military failure, because it entirely failed to remove or destroy France.

At the opening of 1915 German purpose was dictated by the circumstances in the East, circumstances which arose out of the weakness of her Austrian ally. In the opening months of the war, while Germany was failing strategically in the West, Austria was failing tactically in the East. To put it simply, Germany was losing a campaign of invasion; she was being thrown back, but without general route or anything suggesting disaster on the battlefield; Austria was being overwhelmed on the field and her armies were being routed and swept before the Russians in disorder.

The mission of the Austrians had been to hold Russia until Germany destroyed France. Austria failed. It was necessary for Germany, before the issue in France was determined, to send large forces to the East to save Austria. She had done this, but so menacing did Russia remain and so weak had Austria become that it was no longer possible to give her main attention to the West; she was compelled to turn toward Russia, leaving her own armies, reduced to the minimum of safety, to hold back the Anglo-French armies in the West.

German purpose in the campaign of 1915 is thus disclosed. She had bolstered up Austria before the year ended and averted the immediate peril of collapse; but Russia was pounding up to the Carpathians, sending Cossacks into Hungary, threatening Cracow and successfully maintaining the defensive in Poland, while actually occupying German territory in East Prussia.

Accordingly, Germany resolved to repeat against Russia the operation she had attempted against France the previous year. Her whole purpose for 1915 must be to dispose of Russia, as she had failed to dispose of France—to achieve Jena, having missed Austerlitz. If she could do this she might still hope to return to the West and finish the work that she had been unable to complete there.

The single test of German success in 1915 must be found by examining what Germany did in the light of what she intended to, what she attempted to, what she strove with every energy to accomplish.

Check.

Viewed from this angle it is impossible not to recognize that Germany failed again. She did not put Russia out. She did not cripple her as Napoleon crushed Austria at Austerlitz and Prussia at Jena. Russia did not sue for peace as Austria had a century before. The German military commentators and German publicists like Harden supply the best testimony available to prove that Russia is not ready to quit, that she is not so terribly crippled as to be compelled to ask for peace, or even to desire peace at considerable cost.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that, taken as a whole, the German performance in Russia was in the military sense more profitable. Once you have recognized that in its main purpose it was an absolute failure, once you have fixed clearly in your mind the fact that what Germany attempted to do was to put Russia out, and that she did not do this, it is simple to estimate in terms of provinces conquered, cities taken and battles won the considerable achievement of the Germans.

If Germany had failed against Russia, as Napoleon failed at Leipzig, Austria and Germany would both have been invaded, the war would have been lost for the Central Powers in the present year. And there was widespread belief in Allied quarters that Russia would win; she had numbers, her Galician and East Prussian armies were far within hostile territory. In point of fact, German failure in the West had brought the fortunes of the Central Powers to a position that seemed desperate.

All this German successes on the Dunajec, the Vistula and the Niemen changed. At the close of the campaign the Germans had thrown the Russians not merely out of East Prussia and all but a tiny sliver of Galicia, but they had occupied all of Poland and most of Courland. They had destroyed the great Russian armies that had faced them at the outset and they were now confronted by inferior troops, poorly equipped and deprived, by German capture, of most of their artillery. By her successes Germany had possessed herself of all the great Russian barrier fortresses, and her own eastern frontier and that of Austria were assured.

Allied Offensive Collapses.

At the beginning of 1915 what were Allied hope and purpose? Unquestionably the Allied public believed, and many Allied military chiefs expected, that the Grand Alliance would be able, in the coming year to complete the work of crushing Germany. Unquestionably France and Great Britain planned to open the summer with a drive that would clear France and Belgium. Russia had every reason to expect that her armies, far in Austrian territory and beyond the eastern frontier of Prussia, would pass the Carpathians and penetrate to Budapest.

All the things that the Allies hoped and planned came to nothing. Russian failure, after the passing success at Przemysl, became unmistakable in the opening days of May, and Russian retreat did not end until September. All prospects of a Russian offensive for many months were abolished.

In the West the situation differed only in degree. German purpose did not go beyond holding the lines in the West and German purpose prevailed. In Artois, in May and June, in Champagne and Artois in September, the Anglo-French forces won considerable local successes, measured by men and guns captured, but they were devoid of other value.

Allied failure in the West was determined by the complete breakdown of the British. In May they were disclosed so destitute of ammunition that all hope of a spring drive had to be abandoned. In September their high command and subordinate officers proved so inefficient that a considerable possible success was missed at Loos. In sum, the British army failed to arrive, and its failure dictated the situation in the West.

On the other hand the situation in the West did materially improve from the Allied standpoint, because between the Battles of Flanders and those of Champagne and Artois there was allowed to the French and the British nearly a year to reorganize their military machinery, to provide the munitions, construct the wall of defence which now bars further German advance. It enabled England to raise millions of men, whose ultimate value, when they and their officers have been trained, cannot be overlooked.

Two Ideas.

Two ideas were in conflict at the opening of 1915. The German idea was to crush Russia, compel a separate peace and thus be free to turn against the Anglo-French armies in the West, as Napoleon turned from Austerlitz to Jena. The Allied idea was to exert such pressure upon Germany from the West and the East that under the combined attack she would collapse inward. Both ideas failed utterly.

Yet it is essential to perceive that the failure of the German idea may prove the more fatal in the end, because the German situation is more gravely affected by the question of time than the Allied is. Thus, as I pointed out at the start, given the advantage of numbers, wealth and latent military force, the Allies were bound to win in the end, so far as historical parallels have any weight, so far as German military teachings of the period before the war were accurate, unless Germany could get a decision in advance of the arrival of a time when the war became one of exhaustion.

Germany's best chance was to win in 1914, when she attacked France. She came close to success, but she failed. Her next best chance was in 1915, when she turned against Russia. For many weeks it seemed possible that she might succeed in the East, but she failed again. She did not get a decision, which it was far more necessary to have in 1915 than it was in 1914, for the element of time was going against her steadily. Not only the element of time, for had Germany succeeded in France or in Russia, she might have won the war in the larger sense; that is, she might have imposed her will absolutely upon her opponents as Napoleon did after Austerlitz and again after Friedland.

If France had been defeated at the Marne, if Russia had lost her main army at Vilna, or if it had been enveloped about Warsaw, the consequences cannot be mistaken. It is by thinking of them that it is possible to get a full measure of what military writers mean when they say that Germany has failed.

As to the Allied failure, it is not worth much time discussing that, because there never was a moment during the year when there was any chance that the Allied purpose could be realized. If the Allies hoped for a few months for a decision in their favor in the year, they soon appreciated the fact that the maximum of success was to avoid disaster—keep their coalition unbroken.

Navalism Vanquishes Militarism.

There was, however, one field in which the Allies won a tremendous victory, in my judgment far overbalancing the local victories of Germany in her French and Russian campaigns. The British fleet finally demonstrated its supremacy by meeting and abolishing the submarine peril; it assured to Great Britain and her allies the mastery of the ocean and it drew about Germany a blockade the effects of which are revealed in all German newspapers.

It is not accurate to say that Germany is starving, it may not be possible for the blockade to bring about German starvation; but had Germany been able to isolate Great Britain, British starvation would have come immediately. More and more Germany will feel the hardships and discomforts that flow from the blockade—more and more there will be privation; in addition, there is and must remain a complete stagnation of the commerce of Germany. She cannot buy or sell in the world. Her fleets and her factories, her fields and her mines, are unable to contribute through export trade to the costs of war.

British sea power was the decisive element in the Napoleonic wars. The British fleet protected Great Britain and thus gave one nation immunity from invasion. Other nations were defeated in the field and compelled to make peace on Napoleon's terms, but Britain kept on fighting and again and again made coalitions which in the end weakened Napoleon and brought his downfall.

Reading the battle news, looking at the map, we are all impressed with the greatness of German success and the vastness of her conquests. Yet all her conquests are hardly of a greater value than the power to use the sea. If she holds Belgium and Northern France, these are not of greater value to Germany now than would be the ability to use the sea, and they are not a disproportionate price to pay for British consent to use her merchant fleet again. If Germany cannot compel Britain to abandon the blockade, she will have ultimately to persuade her, and she can only hope to persuade her by evacuating Belgium and France.

The effects of sea power are not to be seen on the map or in any careless estimate of war situations, but no student of history can mistake the lessons of the past. The triumph of German militarism, meaning by that the success of the splendid military machine of the Germans, has fallen far short of the completeness of the success of British navalism.

Germany's Third Bid.

I have dwelt so far upon the past campaigns because I desire my readers to understand my reasons for regarding the German campaigns to the present moment as failures. Twice Germany has undertaken, with her fullest military power, to get a decision. Had she won in either case, as she hoped and expected to win and as she came near winning, she could have hoped to win the war. Having failed, as she did, it was now left to German military leaders to devise a method for ending the war, without losing absolutely, or losing all of the things that had been won, things that did not in the aggregate permit her to win absolutely, but left her far greater in area and population and with a far better prospect for the future than she had in August, 1914.

It was no longer possible after Vilna to win the war by a complete tactical or strategic success. It was inevitable that the war would be lost unless the Allies could be persuaded by a prolongation of the series of German victories to make peace, thus giving over the idea of imposing their will upon Germany. Germany could not defeat the Allies, but she could perhaps convince them that she was not to be beaten and that it was the wiser part of statesmanship to abandon the idea of a victory by exhaustion and make terms.

It was clear that no terms would include permanent German occupation of Belgium, of any portion of French territory. To such terms neither France nor Great Britain would or could consent. On the other hand, it was possible that neither France nor Great Britain would care to continue the terrible struggle merely to restore Poland to Russia. France might be placated by a cession of Metz and the French-speaking portion of Lorraine. Belgium might be indemnified by a purchase price for Belgian Congo, French Congo being the *quid pro quo* for Metz.

At the worst, from the German point of view, there might be a general agreement to restore the boundaries of 1914, save for the cession of the Trentino, Gorizia and Albania to Italy.

For their part, Germany and Austria could find compensation in the Balkans. If the Allies would consent to sacrifice Serbia and agree to leave Turkey intact, there would still be a real reward for the great sacrifices both had made and Germany's place in the sun would be assured in the Turkish Empire. But first of all it was necessary to obtain physical control in the Balkans. Accordingly Germany made her third bid, this time for peace, not conquest.

Complete Success.

In her third venture Germany realized the maximum of success on the field in the minimum of time. Her diplomacy had prepared the way for her soldiers. Bulgaria promptly enlisted, Serbia was crushed, the weak Allied forces landed at Salonica came too late and were soon on their way back, threatened with extermination. The Gallipoli operation was condemned to complete failure by the arrival of German ammunition at the Straits. The road from Berlin to Constantinople, indeed to Bagdad and the frontiers of Egypt, was open.

Having laid stress upon German failure in France and in Russia, it is necessary to lay equal emphasis upon German success in the Balkans. Germany had a decision with Serbia in a brief time. Every obstacle was overwhelmed in the field, while at Bucharest and Athens German diplomacy succeeded in preventing action which might have imperilled the whole undertaking, or, in the case of Rumania, enlisted a new enemy, whose coming would have turned the Balkan affair into a disaster.

Now, this success having been achieved, Germany by every possible sign indicated her willingness to discuss peace. She made clear that she was no longer in the mood that displayed itself in Belgium, in France. She had given over all thought of conquering either France or Russia; she recognized that Britain was still unharmed, that there could be no peace that did not give France back all her own territory and possibly a portion of Alsace-Lorraine. This mood, this spirit, is the best evidence of the fact that Germany had appreciated her failure in the two earlier campaigns, when success might have allowed her to speak as Napoleon spoke at Pressburg or Tilsit, or as his enemies spoke at Vienna.

This mood was not in the least a confession of defeat in the absolute sense. It was the mood of Louis XIV in the Nimwegen Peace. He had failed of his grander purpose, but he had won campaigns, conquered provinces, annexed towns; still, he felt the need of time to reorganize his army, repair his mistakes. Accordingly, his terms were most moderate in view of the existing situation. In the same way German armies were undefeated and in the enemy's country; but the price of war had now become disproportionate to the possible profit, and Germany was ready, on her own terms, but not unreasonable terms, to end the war.

The New Phase.

We have seen that Germany has undertaken three great offensive operations. She has undertaken them because, the advantages of numbers and wealth being against her, she was compelled to force the issue and seek by rapidity of movement and efficiency of organization to overcome the handicap. In this she followed the example of Napoleon, who succeeded in this strategy at Austerlitz and failed and fell at Waterloo. In this time Allied inefficiency and inferiority in organization have been such that Germany has been able to take the offensive at will.

But we have also seen that the first offensive failed in France and the second in Russia. The third succeeded beyond praise as a military operation, but it also failed of its objective, for its objective was not military, but political. It failed to produce the effect in the minds of Germany's enemies that she hoped to produce, and in consequence they declined all suggestions of peace. As to its military effect, it had none, save as it immediately eliminated a small Serbian army. It can only have an effect upon the Allied military prospects in the future as it may prove the first step in an attack upon the British Empire either at Suez or in India.

With the rejection of German proposals for peace, not peace founded upon German surrender, it should always be remembered, but peace based on a moderate realization upon German military successes in local operations, the war enters into a new phase. It becomes deliberately and unmistakably a war of exhaustion. The Allies have chosen to make war for the deliberate purpose of crushing Germany, fully aware that they could have peace on terms which would leave them practically intact and with no serious diminution of their power. But such a peace would leave Germany and Germany's ally, Austria, in the same situation.

In making their decision, which is the striking circumstance of the closing weeks of 1915, the Allies have indicated that they are assuming the position which the opponents of Napoleon took in 1813 and 1814; they are resolved to make no peace until Germany is again brought back to the limits of the period before the war, until she is deprived of all the profits of her campaigns, as France was shorn of all that she had gained in the wars of the Revolution and the Empire.

What the Allies Expect.

It is essential to recognize this fact and its importance because all that is to come will result from the decision of the Allies not to make peace on things as they are, not even to make peace on things exactly as they were, for France expects to have Alsace-Lorraine, and all the Allies mean that Serbia shall have Bosnia, Italy Trieste and Trentino.

This determination is based on an unmistakable expectation of victory. Nations do not continue a doubtful war when a reasonable settlement is to be had unless they are satisfied that more can be gained at a price they are willing to pay. France, Russia, Great Britain and Italy are all convinced that they can together crush Germany and her allies. They are so sure of it that they have rejected a chance to make peace.

Now, it is well to keep in mind during the next year exactly what grounds the Allies have for expecting to win. We shall then see as the war progresses whether they were wrong or right; if they prove to have been wholly wrong, it is certain that they will not persevere in their course after their mistake has been established. Twelve months should tell the story. I do not mean that the Allies will be able to conquer Germany in that time, but I do believe that if they fail in that time to make such progress as to be able to envisage ultimate triumph they will abandon their present mood.

Briefly, the Allies are satisfied that German numbers have begun or are about to begin to fail. They fix at 8,000,000 the sum total of man power of the Germans, using every known method of calculation. They figure that Germany has now lost permanently at least 3,500,000 and that before spring the total will be far past 4,000,000. They know that it requires above 3,000,000 men to hold the German lines and that another 1,000,000 is required for communications, garrisons and other services. Austria's situation is even more serious, because her first armies were routed and she has lost upward of 1,000,000 in prisoners.

No such failing of resources affects the British or the Russians or the Italians; only the French are face to face with the same menace, and British numbers are coming up to replace French wastage.

The Problems of Endurance.

Thus the Allies believe that by spring the Germans will probably be compelled to shorten their lines somewhere. But such a step, the evacuation of France, Belgium or Poland, will be the signal to all Europe—to the world—that the end is in sight. It may come in April, but it must come before autumn; this is the Allied calculation on which the statesmen of four great nations are staking all.

But attrition of men is only half; there is the question of food and of money. Germany is suffering—we have Harden's word for this—because of food shortage; she is suffering from economic paralysis resulting from the blockade, and she is compelled to find money in sums disproportionate to her resources, compared with Great Britain or France, when she has to act as the banker for Turkey and Austria. Add to the failing of men the hardships and perils incident to economic and commercial paralysis and you have a conspectus of Allied calculation.

These calculations may be right or wrong. The Germans deny them all, and none has been satisfactorily proven yet, but they explain the state of mind that makes for war. German military writers, public men, soldiers, are unanimous in their denial of such assertions; Germany insists that she can outlast her foes; but it remains for the next few months to determine this, and until it is determined talk of peace is idle.

Meantime, if these calculations are correct, a Turkish campaign against Egypt or even India, no matter how successful, will not affect the outcome of the war, for it will not add to German numbers nor materially reduce Allied strength. The fate of the Near East, the fate of Africa and of Asia, so far as Europe is concerned, will be settled in Europe. The decisive thing is the purpose of military operations and the degree to which they realize the expectations of those who frame them. A German-Turkish operation in Egypt must succeed or fail as it affects the Continental situation.

"Crushing Germany."

Last of all I desire to call attention to the reasons that have so far acted to persuade the French, the British and the Russians to stop at no sacrifice and pause before no German terms, however moderate. London, Paris and Petrograd believe absolutely that the future of the world will be imperilled if Germany emerges from this war with the slightest profit in territory or population. They believe that only by bringing economic ruin and military defeat in the most complete fashion upon Germany can they make certain for many decades to come their own security and safety.

The Allies are in the mood that Europe adopted toward Napoleon in the latter years of the Empire. They desire to make an end to what they conceive to be the German peril. All of the Allies are animated by the bitterest possible resentment, roused by what they believe to be German conduct during the opening weeks of the war. They accept the reports of atrocities in Belgium, France and Poland, and they are acting in the spirit that belief in these things creates. It is not possible to understand the war now without recognizing this state of mind. It still dominates Europe, it still directs Allied national sentiment.

It is not necessary to share this mood or to approve it, but even in studying the military situation, and much more in studying the political situation, it is essential to take the full measure of it. The Allies expect to win, they expect to crush Germany; but apart from all else, the anger and bitterness that the past has provoked, the past as they see it, makes them impatient of peace talk while the remotest chance to attain their main purpose remains.

Another year of sacrifice without prospect of success may remove much of this passion; it is hard to see how anything else can; this is the point where peace prophecies fail and Americans, seeing only the outward aspects of the war, go astray in their estimate of the true situation. Germany is ready for peace on reasonable terms; her opponents are not ready for peace on any terms that leave Germany what she asks and will fight to keep. Germany's enemies believe they can crush her; she does not believe she can crush them, but she is satisfied they cannot crush her. She, not the Entente, is now fighting for existence.