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IN AN OBSERVATION PLANE

MANY of our soldiers have returned to us with bitterest words for American officers. In the nature of things we cannot investigate the truth of these complaints, but inasmuch as they co-incide with conditions in the American army before the war we are justified in accepting them as the basis for criticism and for a reform which will make our army democratic. Already, after years of tyranny and in the face of the administration's chastisement of those who have raised their voices for fairness, an attempt is being made in congress to revise the rules and practices of courts martial so that the system shall shed the character of czarism and take on the character of our democracy.

When our soldiers went to France they found the French army democratic. The officer treated his soldiers as his brothers. They were at liberty to mingle with the officers off duty and to assert their dignity as citizens of a republic. Not so with our own men in a land as free as ours, if we may believe the stories brought back by the doughboys.

I heard the other day of a remarkable address made by a French general to American students of the military art who were about to take positions as officers in the ranks of the French. I am told that this is what he said:

"Gentlemen, you are now fitted in a military sense to take charge of the French soldiers whom you are about to command. But as you go forth to exercise control I feel that I owe a duty to you and to myself to give you a warning. You must not treat the French soldiers as your American officers treat the American soldiers. If you do, they will rebel. They are not accustomed to such treatment. They expect to be accorded the consideration that French officers give them. I assure you that if you give them that consideration they will not take advantage of it. They will understand; they will do their duty and you will have no reason to regret that you have taken my advice."

The American officer was trained to be a gentleman in an ancient school, but there was something fundamentally wrong with the school and the officer, often developed into a snob. While life in these United States was generally free from snob-

bery except in certain exclusive circles where idleness and vice asserted supreme sway snobbery was practiced as a fine art in the army. If it was not a part of the training—and we think it was not—it was an inheritance from European social conditions of other centuries. It came to us from the aristocratic regime of the British army in which, until recently, petted lordlings were accorded the traditional privileges of the military caste. We perpetuated that caste in our own army. However charming the fine culture of the West Pointer he was out of tune with the spirit of his own country. He was hedged about by a barb-wire entanglement of aristocratic traditions. He was required to be both a snob and a tyrant in his treatment of his men. They were placed on a social grade, compared with him, which about corresponded to the grade a negro occupied with reference to his master in the days of slavery.

Individual preferences, genial dispositions and whatever measure of democracy was communicated from the body of the American public through the insulation that separated the military aristocracy from the civilians, tended to mitigate the rigors of absolutism in our army. But all too frequently the martinet, the scion of a brutal line, the alcohol addict or the officer with the soul of a stunted flea, aggravated this rule of master and slave.

When our boys first went to France, I am told, conditions were not so bad. They were freely entertained by the French. Everywhere they were treated with courtesy and consideration, but at length the snobbery of their officers, of the American military caste, began to interfere with this frank and human intercourse. Today, wherever the doughboy goes, he finds the sign: "Reserved for officers." He cannot associate with his officers on the same democratic terms that the poilu associates with his officers. The American military caste—the Prussian military caste. In France our soldiers are often told by the Frenchmen that they are treated no better by their officers than is the Prussian soldier by his officers. It is an exaggeration, of course. Our officers are not on a plane with those

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