

THE NATION IN ARMS: A RETROSPECT

BY AN ARMY OFFICER

IN EVERY occupation save two the past century and a quarter has been an age of specialization and differentiation. In the professions, not only does the surgeon no longer double as a barber, but an expert laparotomist will seldom venture to remove a tonsil. In the mechanic arts, it is indeed a broadly educated and somewhat old-fashioned fellow who, if employed to tighten Nut No. 4168, can also adjust No. 4167.

The two exceptions are the ancient and closely related trades of government and war. Thanks to the associated superstitions of nationalism and democracy, these have become the business of the whole people—the amateur in mass. In them, indeed, the expert is looked upon with suspicion. “Politician” is the most opprobrious epithet in politics. To attain the highest office the aspirant must show qualification as a dirt farmer, a rough rider, a college professor, or an engineer.

The same anti-expert prejudice is found in the business of war. Even schoolbooks do not lack the suggestion that Caesar’s experience as a Roman Jimmie Walker was of more value in Gaul than his years with the legions; or that, without the broadening experience of the leather business, Grant could never have travelled from Washington to Richmond at fifty miles a year. Whether the surrender of politics to the cult of the amateur has been entirely beneficial is a question I leave for students of the *Congressional Record*. But

the effects of this change in my own homicidal profession have interested and engaged me for many years.

Mass warfare is not, of course, a purely modern phenomenon. Our remote Germanic ancestors are reported to have joined battle with the entire male strength of the tribe, while the women and ancients formed a National Security League to screech and hoot from the wagons. Until almost our own time, however, this method of war was associated with primitive life. Whenever people reached a relatively high state of civilization they found it expedient to hire professional soldiers, and to carry on their wars with the least possible derangement of the normal community life. In Rome, for example, the army ceased to be a national militia somewhere about the time of Marius.

Even the primitive Teutons, as they became domesticated, began to realize the convenience and advantage of a professional soldiery. The feudal system itself was an effort to create and support a fighting and governing class, who, in return for a living, protected the non-combatant workers from attack. There followed the age of the *condottieri*, completely professional, but, since they enlisted in large groups, a bit too well equipped with *esprit de corps*, and too prone to collective bargaining, for the perfect comfort of the political authority.

The peak of the development of the professional army came in the middle part

of the Eighteenth Century. Soldiers were then hired individually and were individually subject to the political state. Free from national prejudices, they fought for professional pride and a small stipend, equally willing to provide for the common defense and to preserve domestic tranquillity. It appears to have been quite unnecessary, in order to quicken their ardor in battle, to depict their enemies as baby-killers, ravishers of women, and dog-stealers, or to furnish them with Sunday-school leaflets and posters. They fought when and whom they were told to fight.

Their discipline, by all accounts, was superior to anything in the present day armies—as was that of the Roman legionaries. War was not only a learned profession to them, but a profitable business. There was no question in those days whether it was cheaper to lose the war and pay the indemnity or to win it and pay the bonus. The frightful casualty lists of the late unpleasantness were unknown. Soldiers were valuable government property, expensive to procure and tedious to train; so the skilled practitioner must know how to conserve his men, as well as his horses and powder: it was not enough to attack in such lavish depth that the rear ranks would outlast the enemy's ammunition.

Now, it is the habit of man to justify his own acts. In consequence, we find in both the military and the general literature of the last hundred years many misrepresentations of the old-time professional. It is the day of mob armies, and scorn is heaped upon the mercenary. Standing armies, it is said, are dangerous to liberty—presumably because they can be relied upon by the government to suppress disorder or revolution. In England, the specific Anglo-Saxon prejudice against skilled soldiers appears to rest, in the main, on the

memory of Cromwell's military dictatorship (which would have been escaped if the Stuarts had had an army), and, in America, on the fact that the colonists displayed a natural reluctance to pay taxes for the British garrison (thus escaping a tax on tea to endure in the persons of their descendants the prohibition of whiskey, and avoiding a stamp tax to encounter the Revenue Act of 1932).

Even the ancients, in the first flush days of citizen armies, were maligned. Historians pointed the finger of scorn at the Carthaginians, who hired mercenaries to meet—and defeat—the embattled farmers of Rome. It is true that Carthage suffered some rather well-deserved inconvenience after her failure to pay off Hamilcar's Sicilian expeditionary force, but that might have been avoided by a display of simple honesty. The conversion of the Roman army to professionalism has been blamed for the fall of Rome—which actually occurred somewhere between 500 and 1500 years later. There is criticism of the part played by the army in the selection of the Emperor (Rome had no recognized system of succession, and the Emperors chosen by the legions were probably no worse than the rest), and there is forgetfulness of the centuries of peace and security brought by the same legions to those within the empire.

Particularly caustic has been the comment on the bloodless Eighteenth Century warfare, on the maneuvering made possible by the high training of the troops, and the cautious tactics made necessary by their cost. The failure of the skilled general to butt blindly against the stone wall of battle was absurd, it appears, and perhaps even a trifle effeminate. A willingness to wade through blood to victory was virility; to get there with dry feet was weakness.

II

How and why did the Eighteenth Century army disappear? The present national army—like no inconsiderable number of other modern evils—came from France and the Revolution. The Revolution was directed against the government, and so against the army, the government's defender; it was democratic, and so antagonistic to the aristocratic organization of the army; it was nationalistic, and so hostile to the professional soldier, whose loyalty was not to the vague concept of the nation, but to his superiors, to his employer, and to his profession; who, indeed, like any other scientist, respected and sympathized with his fellow professionals in other countries; who might, and often did, change his employer and his allegiance.

The Revolution meant the decay from within or the destruction from without of the old army. The confidence and the firmness of the officers were undermined; then the Revolutionary spirit infected the troops. Individuals imbued with the professional spirit were dismissed or murdered. The symbol of the old army is the Swiss mercenary, who died defending the King who hired him—and, as subsequent events have shown, the cause of liberty and decency in France.

Then the liberated democracy embarked—as democracies will—on a foreign policy which embroiled France with all Europe. An army could not be created on the spur of the moment, nor were the new rulers in any mood to create one. So they had to arm the mob—and the Nation in Arms was born. It was a return, and the leaders said so, to the tribal system of warfare. Everyone, in some capacity or other, was to have his part in the war—fighting, casting cannon, rolling bandages, or screaming in the public square. The soldier was

to fight for the Fatherland and not for pay. Therefore, he need not be paid. The system required little ready cash.

A new tactical method developed, resting at base on superiority of numbers, inferiority of training, and cheapness of life. The new soldiers could not maintain the perfect thin line of the previous generation, so the thin line had to go. But the whole manpower of the nation was at the disposal of the leaders; no time was needed to train replacements, for the dead they replaced were untrained. So they devised the attack in column—and the rear ranks advanced over piles of their own dead. The old delicate system of supply would not work, so the soldier turned brigand and lived on the country. (Since nations, not armies, were fighting, why respect the rights or property of noncombatants?)

This armed mob conquered Western Europe, and held it for a few years. Later writers saw only the conquest, and assumed lightly that numbers would always overcome skill. But there were other factors: diplomatically Europe was divided, was never really united until 1814; the Revolution had released a store of moral energy—or fanaticism—which made its soldiers ready to die in a holy cause. Finally, it discovered a leader. (The fact is often forgotten that France first had years of defeat.) When at last the mob was partly trained, this leader of genius—though undoubtedly with limitations—appeared. Bonaparte, the Italian *condottiere*, was a professional, trained in the old school, but ready to adapt himself to the new army.

Victory was short-lived. It is true that the defeats of 1813 and 1814 were at the hands of other national armies—hysterical German patriot met hysterical French patriot. But it is also true that some part of the credit, in Spain and again at Waterloo,

must go to the British professional, the ancestors of Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Leayroyd. But far more significant is the fact that the downfall of the First Empire can be traced to the inherent weakness of the army of the Revolution. The theory that men are expendable, brought to its logical conclusion in the last war, drained French manpower faster than it could be replaced. The theory of living on the country worked only so long as there was a fresh and populous country to live on.

The fate of the Russian campaign was tragically inevitable. Numbers were the reliance of the system, and overwhelming numbers were provided. But overwhelming numbers stripped bare the country in which they camped. The army could not stop: once set in motion, it must keep moving lest it starve. The new tactical system supplied the terrible losses of Borodino, to add to the attrition of the years before. Finally, at Moscow, it could advance no further; and it began a retreat across the desert it had created. Living on the country was impossible; with the transport available and the numbers involved, a return to the old method of supply from the rear was equally impossible. But it was still possible to starve.

The new discipline was also in evidence. The accounts show what happens when an army trained to plunder finds nothing to plunder but its own dépôts. The Grand Army had come from a mob, and when it got back to Germany it had returned whence it came. France was defeated in the War of Liberation because she no longer had enough men, or well enough trained men. She didn't have them because they had been shot by the tactical system, or starved by the supply system that the Revolutionary army invented and made necessary.

III

Nevertheless, the new sort of army continued to develop in Europe, and came later to something like perfection. For France had forced it upon another country, upon the same country that had perfected the professional army of the previous century. In 1806 the Prussian professionals, led by senile old gentlemen against a genius, went down to defeat at Jena. Thinking (as later statesmen were to think) to make that defeat permanent, Bonaparte limited the Prussian army to 40,000 men.

In France the national army had been in theory only an expedient, a war measure. But Prussia, with the Prussian genius for organization, and especial genius for war, made it a permanent system. If Prussia could have but 40,000 men, they need not remain the same 40,000. In peace as well as in war, the whole people could perform its military service. Each man, on coming of age, could serve his time, pass to the reserve, and be replaced by another and younger; then, in war, the reservists could return to the colors. The plan promised to furnish large armies at small cost; and it was adopted. Thence sprang the armies of 1866, of 1870, of 1914.

So far as the system could be improved, Prussia improved it. So far as short service men could be made to resemble long service men, the Prussian soldiers came to resemble them. So far as the deficiency of training in the ranks could be supplied by a professional body of skilled officers, the Prussians supplied it. New means of transport eased the difficulties of supply. The resources of the theater of operations became of secondary importance. The result was victory, and the credit went to the system. *Das Volk in Waffen*, the Nation in Arms, became a shibboleth; before long,

to most soldiers, no other arrangement was conceivable. Only two major states held out for the professional army: England had little fighting, save with the barbarians; the United States, in her only major war, adopted the national army only as an emergency measure, and its recruits, both North and South, ran yelling toward—and sometimes away from—one another, stealing silver between rounds.

From 1870 to 1914 the Franco-German War was the model to study. In brevity, efficiency, and competent leadership, it approached the old professional warfare. Its generals, with numbers not materially greater than those of the Napoleonic period, had the new transport and the new communications for supply and control. The ponderous German machine creaked at times, but, opposed by enthusiasm not too intelligently directed, it continued to roll. To the future historian it is likely that 1870 will appear, not as a mere phase in the development of mass warfare, but as its finest flower—and the beginning of its decline.

For the race of numbers continued. If transport and communication improved, then armies could be made still larger. The Grand Army of 1812 starved with a wagon train; a railroad could have fed it; therefore, let the Grand Army of the future grow large enough to starve on a railroad. This tendency continued through the years of peace. Between 1914 and 1918 we were to witness the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Nation in Arms. The only limit to size was the number of physically fit, and even that standard could be lowered. Russia is said to have mobilized 15,000,000 men.

No mortal man could control such numbers. Their unwieldiness, their utter lack of maneuverability, appeared even before war was declared. The outbreak itself was

hastened, the war perhaps given its widespread form, by the elaborate nature of mobilization. When the Czar wanted a partial mobilization against Austria, the machinery was too unwieldy, and mobilization had to be all or none. The Kaiser, hoping to keep England out, tried to stop the invasion of Belgium. Unthinkable! Not a railroad schedule could be changed, not a unit could do column left, without upsetting the whole clumsy monster!

Such forces could not maneuver, could not turn and twist and dodge in the Eighteenth Century style. They could only start forward on a detailed plan worked out through the years, and continue till they struck. When finally they had sprawled across the map of Europe, there was no room left to move, even if they had been capable of movement. With nothing left to do but to butt, they butted. Why not? Men were cheap and plentiful. Russia, carrying this theory to its bitter end, supplied her deficiency of weapons with a sufficiency of men, and lost at times a third of a million a month.

Again the supply difficulty arose, but in a new form. In 1812 the theater of operations couldn't supply the army. A century later the whole theater of war couldn't. The size of the army had grown so that its mobilization upset the entire life of the state. The economic system was hopelessly disorganized. The nations at war could not furnish both men and supplies—the more men they had in the ranks the more supplies they needed, and the fewer there were to produce them. Ultimately, the lines of communication stretched half way round the globe. It became doubtful whether the whole world could furnish the needed supplies. All reserves of ammunition and weapons were exhausted.

Besides, demobilization would be attended with the same difficulty as mobili-

zation. Each state must go twice through a complete derangement of its economic and social system. The object of the professional army had been to fight the war with the minimum of trouble to the state as a whole—to protect it from the impact of war. The object of the new system seemed to be to involve as many people as possible.

IV

Post-war proposals for the extension and perfection of the system bear out this appearance. Conscription of labor, conscription of capital, mobilization of industry—a complete return to tribal warfare and a complete dislocation of every function of normal life. Moreover, the further this is carried, unless the state is to remain permanently mobilized, the less the proportion of trained personnel, even among officers and directors, and the greater the consequent inefficiency.

But perhaps the worst feature of all has to do with the successors of our Teutonic grandmothers who shrieked in the tribal wagons. Propaganda has become a potent and indispensable force; the liar now ranks with the general. The old-time professional soldier did not need to be lied to. He fought because he had long been habituated to obey orders, and because he possessed that odd motive of professional pride, the same which leads a surgeon carefully to perform a difficult operation on a man he doesn't like. The professional soldier did not have to be taught to hate his enemies. Frequently he didn't even dislike them. He probably preferred them to the civilians at home. If they fought well, he admired them with the admiration of one honest tradesman for another; if they didn't, he despised them. It wasn't necessary to tell the Prussian grenadiers that

Maria Theresa practised cannibalism, or to convince the white-coated Austrians that Frederick was a pervert.

Not so the citizen soldier. He has no professional pride, and no habit of obedience. He fights only when he is reduced to the gibbering hysteria of a French Jacobin or a Moslem in a holy war. Propaganda must supply the hysterics.

In a monarchy this might be tolerable. Certainly, even there, it would generate a great deal of unnecessary hatred and result in a great many unnecessary atrocities. But in a democracy the case is worse. For in the monarchy, there is a division between the governor and the governed; the monarch can control the propaganda and maintain a detached and reasonable attitude. In a democracy the citizen soldier of today is the sovereign voter of yesterday and tomorrow. The propaganda agency is theoretically the servant of the very people it seeks to deceive. The propagandist is either self-deceived, or, if he is a clever cynic, he can control the state. It is scarcely necessary to advert to the absurdities of the propaganda in the last war, or to its lasting postwar effects—to nonsense and historical lies written in treaties to please people who had been whooped to fighting mood by the methods of a Negro camp-meeting.

As a matter of fact, the very idea behind the propaganda weapon is anarchical. As I have said, the professional soldier fights because he is told to fight by competent authority. This is not enough for the citizen soldier, who is taught to fight because his cause is right. The natural corollary is that he need not fight if his cause is unjust. Yet his refusal to fight then is illegal. Moreover, in a democracy, he is supposed to fight, not for the sovereign state but for that hazy entity, the Nation, of which he himself is a part. His natural

resort, if the enemy propaganda bites deep enough, is revolution. As an amateur he has no horror of the professional sin of mutiny. The state has no professional force to rely on. In the last analysis the discipline of the army rests on a belief in everything that appears in the newspapers.

V

With this somewhat dark view of the past, what of the future? The pacifists see this, or part of it, with some imaginary horrors of their own. And they attribute it all to the nature of war itself. Their remedy is to abolish war. But the eventual feasibility and even desirability of this remains debatable.

To me, at least, the profession of arms is not only the oldest, but the most permanent of the professions. But, assuredly, to any but the blindest and cheeriest of optimists, the immediate accomplishment of the pacifists' programme is more than doubtful. Certainly the antics of the peoples of the world, so lately liberated from despotism, give little encouragement. Democracy may be a basis for world peace, but its history, from Athens to France, scarcely furnishes proof. Liberal nationalism, the prop of the Fourteen Points, looks like a broken reed.

Our hope lies elsewhere. Most of the horrors, so eloquently depicted in pacifist nightmares, are not inherent in war, but are merely concomitants of the strange and primitive war organization, begun by Carnot, continued by Bonaparte and Scharnhorst, and perfected by Moltke.

There is every reason to hope that the age of the war of masses has already passed. Years ago, von der Goltz, author of the standard treatise on the Nation in Arms, suggested that it might be a passing phase. Ancient infantry gave way to

medieval cavalry, medieval cavalry to modern infantry. And the swing from small to large armies and back has happened before. We have seen the gross unwieldiness of the army of masses. We can conceive its vulnerability to a relative small force—a professional force of several hundred thousand—trained to the Eighteenth Century standard of discipline, equipped with every modern weapon, and making up in mobility and maneuverability what it lacks in weight.

In military science the orthodoxy of to-day becomes the heresy of tomorrow—when the orthodox army is defeated. Once the professional few beat the amateur many, other states will be quick to follow. Until that happens, consideration of the armament and tactics of the New Mercenaries must be speculation. It is a form of speculation to which general staffs might profitably devote some time; but so far it has been left to the Tom Swift school of expert—to the gas boys, the tank boys, the magic airship boys.

We can give some credence to their views. An unquestioned advantage of the small army will be its ability to adopt the latest and best of arms, to use (like the late medieval Free Companies) the maximum protection of armor. It does not follow, however, that military development must be left to the chemist, the mechanic, and the maker of boiler-plate. In fact, changes in arms and their use may readily be of degree rather than kind.

It is axiomatic that an army can make up for inferiority in numbers by superiority in speed. For superiority in speed may allow concentration of numbers at the decisive point. In the new army, increased speed will be a matter partly of improved discipline, and partly of mechanical transport. Then, too, there will be a larger proportion of effectives: less depth will be

needed; fewer reserves; a smaller administrative and sustaining personnel. (Precedent is found in the greater fire power of the British line against the Napoleonic column.) The proportion of automatic weapons will increase: for with a smaller army, we can supply the weapons and their ammunition; and, with higher training, we can make them more effective. Thus far, at least, we may go with the mechanists in substituting iron for blood.

But ability to maneuver will be still more important. The New Army will regain the power to change direction. Best of all, perhaps, it will be able to retreat. General Bernhardt's formula for the penetration of an entrenched position is a prepared retirement—to draw the enemy from his works and strike him with a decisive counterattack. Such a maneuver will re-

quire professional standards of training. Beside the army of masses suffers intolerable strain when it moves, even though it can move forward. (*Vide* the 1812 Campaign.) A delaying policy, common to all professional forces, may readily bring the enemy to the verge of collapse, since the maintenance of a Nation in Arms deranges the whole economic and social life of the state which supports it.

There is an historical parallel—worth no more and no less than other historical parallels: after Tilsit, France forced upon Prussia the national army, and Prussia, with the same genius that had produced the army of Frederick the Great, refined it, and gave it to Europe and the world; after Versailles, France forced upon Germany a small professional army.

The result remains to be seen.

BETTER DAYS FOR RAIL PASSENGERS

BY EDWARD HUNGERFORD

FOR many years short haul was the *bête noire* of your American railroad executive. He put his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest and spat upon it. Trains rumbling five hundred, a thousand, two thousand miles in an unbroken monopoly of prosperity were his dream of heaven come to earth. Short haul—particularly passenger short haul—was abominable to him. But there was to come a day—and it came well before the end of the Midas era of the late '20s—when he was to look with tearful eyes upon the passing of that selfsame traffic from his hands. It is the toy that is taken away from the child that he regrets the most. Just so with the local passenger business of the American railroads.

The Boston & Maine is primarily short haul and quite largely passenger (35%). Its longest line reaches less than 250 miles; its busiest one—the old Fitchburg, from Bunker Hill through the sacred swales of Massachusetts and the needle's eye of the Hoosac Tunnel to the unregenerate wastes of upper New York State—but 187. In New Hampshire, Southern Maine and the northern stretches of the Old Bay State its lines interlace like a trolley system.

Time was—and that time only a little more than twenty years ago—when the Boston & Maine was a famous passenger carrier. Its short, fat, main stems led from Boston north and east to Portland and the Maine resorts, north and west to the White Mountains and the Green, and, by connec-

tion, on to Montreal and the rest of Canada. For three months of the year it enjoyed a patronage almost beyond its capacity. Velvet. Full cream. Prosperous folk from New York and still further away, Summer-bound. And during the rest of the year, its own New Englanders provided a passenger traffic that at least might be counted upon to pay its way.

Then came the motor-car, the motor-bus, the motor-truck. The defection was first felt in the little branch lines. The old-fashioned operating organization of the road went at the problem in the old-fashioned operating way. It began to lop off trains; in a few cases, all service, even up to the actual abandonment of branches. But the cancer only spread deeper, and soon even the main stems showed its effects. No more full cream. The hotel-keepers of Northern New England became indifferent; their clerks could no longer inform you, offhand, as to the train schedules. One big house up in the White Mountains, which for years had received more than 90% of its patrons by rail, now received less than 8%. Only skimmed milk was left.

The logical end to the process of saving such a situation by the elimination of trains is, of course, the entire abandonment of the road. But, to the Boston and Maine people this was quite unthinkable. Instead, that old-fashioned organization began to develop a new kind of railroad salesmanship. It went to its old public with