

WHY WAR IS SO POPULAR

BY HARVEY S. FORD

WHEN not engaged in whooping up a holy war to exterminate Hitler, protect the Spanish Reds, or extend the conquests of Mother Russia in China, our practicing pacifists are in a great pother to denounce war as the supreme affliction of the human race. War, we are told, is forced on the suffering masses—who want nothing so much as an everlasting peace—by the wily machinations of dictators, the brutalities of aggressor nations, the nefarious commitments of treacherous diplomats, and various other not-too-clearly-specified “underlying causes”. But is there any truth in this? Should the idea that “everybody is against war” be the undisputed axiom it has become? Let us look at the historical facts.

It is almost regrettable that the learned Dr. Ludlow’s recently-discussed scheme for a popular referendum on war was not adopted, if only for the sake of the resulting wholesome disillusionment of the idealists. For it is demonstrable that at no time in history has war

ever been really unpopular. To go way back, it may be recalled that when the Emperor Gallus bought off the Goths in preference to continuing a disastrous war with them, he was promptly murdered by the indignant, war-loving Romans. During the Middle Ages merciless warfare was indulged in so much, and with such popular ardor, that the whole existence of what little civilization remained was threatened. And, to come down to more recent times, what about Napoléon Bonaparte? If there were really anything in the pacifist belief in a popular aversion to war, Napoléon would certainly have been butchered by his own subjects long before Waterloo; he ravaged Europe, he caused the death and mutilation of thousands upon thousands of its citizens, and he kept the world in an uproar for half a generation. In contrast, his opponents were content to conduct war decently in the old manner—*i.e.*, by using mercenary professional armies, and respecting their citizens and private property as much as possible, in-

stead of conscripting the entire nation and plunging it into death and misery as did Napoléon. What was the result? The Allies were constantly beset by insurrections and uprisings from their own minions, while Bonaparte's subjects, far from revolting, fought and died for him to the bitter end, long after even the faintest chance of winning had passed. More, they lavished such devotion upon his name that the mere return of his remains to France was sufficient to unseat a cabinet and, thirty years after his death, win his nephew a crown.

Now it will not be argued that Napoléon was a greater respecter of liberty than his fellow monarchs; in fact it is difficult to imagine a more tyrannical despot. The only answer to the Little Corporal's popularity was, of course, that he let everyone go to war who wanted to. No longer was fighting the privilege of the select few; no longer were there any embarrassing questions as to birth or capability; no longer were the amateurs compelled to stay at home and pay taxes—now anyone could be a soldier. And, once the great masses of Europeans had had a taste of the intoxicating business, their rulers found it impossible to wage a war without letting everyone in on it.

It may be claimed that here the

cart is put before the horse, that these conscript armies have been composed of people unwillingly dragooned into service. In answer, history since Waterloo may be pointed to as a period of a continuous and unabating popular desire for war, the like of which has never before been witnessed. Take the French, who suffered most from Napoléon's adventures. Hardly was he locked up for the second time when they began to itch for his return. The *ersatz* Moroccan wars of the Bourbon and Orleans kings never fooled the French, as similar colonial wars kept the English fairly quiet; schooled by Napoléon, they knew the real thing—500,000 men locked in bloody battle, with 100,000 casualties by evening. No damned skirmish with a bunch of Arabs would do as substitute for such glories. Joyously the French, still licking the wounds of the Grand Armée, followed their second Napoléon to every battlefield from Mexico to China.

Previous to the Franco-German War, it should be noted, the Prussians had made all the submissions that could reasonably be asked; and the legitimate causes for war having been removed, even Napoléon III hesitated. Once his subjects had seen the possibility of

war, however, they refused to consider peace for a moment, and he was forced to go on. It is also possible that Louis was not so reluctant after all, for his government had become unpopular; and the quest of a war by an unpopular government in order to keep itself in power is one of the oldest tricks in history — a neat commentary, in itself, upon the general popularity of war. Having been defeated, Napoléon III was ungratefully abandoned by his people, who, however, continued the war. For while there have been many revolutions because of lost wars, there is yet to be one caused by too much war. Indeed, since revolution means war, only a people yearning for battle would revolt.

After 1871 there was Boulanger and the long series of now-familiar crises leading up to 1914, for it was — and is — a poor year when a mob did not march through Paris and clamor to be led to Berlin. About the origins of the World War a great deal has been written. The “war guilt” has been variously laid at the door of Count Berchtold, the Kaiser, Sazonov, Lord Grey, and a dozen lesser dignitaries. The masses, of course, have been assigned the role of victims. Yet was there anything in the crisis of July 1914 that made it more

difficult of solution than the preceding crises? When it is remembered that, with the exception of Russia, none of the great powers had been involved in a really first-class war for more than a generation, the answer is more obvious. Was it not, as a matter of fact, that the people of Europe refused any longer to put off the fun?

II

To go from the French to the other extreme, examine the English. Because of Nelson the English were deprived of personal experience with Napoléon, and hence remained in a deplorably unprogressive state, content with innumerable little colonial wars. But not always, however, for the Crimean War should not be forgotten. In this case even the historians are obliged to admit that none of the nations, and especially England, had any real interest — economic, political, or otherwise — involved; and moreover the statesmen wished to preserve the peace. Yet war came, and Aberdeen — like Walpole who, before him, had also opposed a war — was ousted. Indeed, one remarkable feature of modern wars is the lack of a decent excuse for their commencement — we have recently descended, à la

Woodrow Wilson, to the level of the Middle Ages, and now go on crusades. It is extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to discover a logical cause for such modern wars as the Crimean and Franco-German, especially if one recalls the more sensible origins of the Eighteenth Century conflicts. Throughout the Nineteenth Century and the present one, popular desire for war has always been a major factor in its origin, and frequently, as in the above cases, seemingly the only factor.

But to return to the English: after 1856 they went back to colonial warfare in steadily increasing scale, reaching a climax in the Boer War, a conflict of almost major proportions. With the World War came the real orgy. For the first time in history England enlisted a draft army. For the first time, too, the English abandoned their traditional policy of only lending a helping hand to Continental allies, and landed an army of millions right in the middle of the most active front. They could do no more.

It must not be supposed that in confining discussion to the extremes of France and England that the rest of the nations have been models of peaceful rectitude. None has escaped the war fever.

For example, we peace-loving Americans had fought, according to the War Department, an even hundred wars by 1917, though most of them were with the Indians. The disasters of the War of 1812 may be directly attributed to the popular insistence for war, which overrode even the elementary fact that we had no army. After the war with Mexico we had exhausted for the moment the possibilities of our neighbors, so we turned to develop a domestic problem—which other nations had been able to solve by simple compensative legislation—into the hardest-fought civil war of all time. Then in 1898 we intervened in a Spanish domestic quarrel, and in 1917 we established an all-time record by traveling 3000 miles to horn into a major war. We have been recently treated to an amusing specimen of American belligerency. Men were heard urging war over Czechoslovakia who a year ago were uncertain as to the spelling of that country's name, and who today would be hard put to it to define the boundaries in dispute, much less give an intelligent account of how they came about.

Only one comment is needed to close this sketchy survey, and to bring home the point to the argument: pick up your daily newspa-

per and read, under almost any dateline, of the universal popular discontent with the fact that four statesmen recently succeeded in temporarily making peace and avoiding a world war at Munich.

III

Having considered at some length, if also somewhat unsystematically, the general history of war, the people's pastime, it is pertinent to come to the case of the common soldier, about whom all the idealistic weeping is done. With regard to the World War, a competent critic has written:

Of all the millions who marched to war in August 1914, only a small proportion marched unwillingly away. The thrill of excitement ran through the world, and the hearts of even the simplest masses lifted to the trumpet-call. A prodigious event had happened. The monotony of toil and of the daily round was suddenly broken. Everything was strange and new. War aroused the primordial instincts of races born of strife. Adventure beckoned her children. A larger, nobler life seemed to be about to open upon the world.¹

Not only the average man, but also the radical pacifist greeted the war with enthusiasm. A courtesy tear for the departed Jaurès, and then a joyous reversion to bombastic

jingismo, repressed these many years—a reversal which, despite volumes of post-war alibis, they have never been able to explain convincingly to an amused and cynical world. Nor, if we are to accept the word of the pacifist Emil Ludwig, did they find life in the army unbearable:

In Prussia, even though we disliked drill, military service was so attractive that, long after it was done with, the reddest of Socialists would, over his beer, love to recall the vanished joys of youth in the army.²

The AEF was organized to the accompaniment of a great flood of patriotic oratory, dealing largely with Belgian atrocities, the *Lusitania*, and the Huns. The boys were reminded that they were crusaders sworn to save democracy, and urged to hang the Kaiser. All this, of course, had its effect. Many of them for the first time *felt important*. The pleasure which being a hero and a patriot—and thus *somebody*—gives to the average man, condemned ordinarily to a life of obscurity, should not be underestimated, and goes a long way towards compensating for whatever hardship war entails.

This patriotic stage usually passed even before the troops arrived in France. But this disillu-

¹ *The Unknown War*, by Winston Churchill. Scribners.

² *Talks with Mussolini*, by Emil Ludwig. Little, Brown.

sionment is not serious. The dough-boy's world did not crash about his ears; he was not overcome with a horrible loathing for all things military; such ideals as he had were not wiped out. Nothing of the kind, in fact. Almost before our hero has learned that all officers are not colonels, the hymns have been replaced by bawdy ballads, the bawdier the better. His admiration, hitherto reserved for the officer who was loudest in his patriotic sentiments, is now lavished on the one who possesses the most ingenious vocabulary of profanity. Indeed, profanity has become the soldier's language. He has learned to drink raw liquor straight, to chew tobacco, and his information upon the subject of women has been increased by several items unknown behind the barns back home. His first time under fire completes his transformation from an awkward civilian into a pretty fair soldier, for while acquiring the above education he has also had the military essentials pounded into him.

Our hero, like the majority of his fellows, having passed the ordeal by fire unhurt, except for a fearful scaring, is now a veteran, and thus entitled to damn the food, criticize his superiors, and make life miserable for the replacements.

He now ceases his efforts to obtain a transfer to some non-combatant branch, such as the Quartermaster Corps, and contents himself with life as an infantryman. In truth he has little to fear, for there never was a battle fought in which the survivors did not far outnumber the killed. Two, or at the most three, full-dress battles a year are about all even the best armies can stand, and since the number behind the front is always considerably greater than those actually under fire, the average soldier runs a good chance of not even being engaged. If he is philosophically inclined, he may reflect that if he were a civilian he would stand an equally good chance of being eliminated in an accident. His thoughts do not, as the sentimentalists would have us believe, turn always to the folks at home, if only because such thoughts would be a waste of time. As one unsung hero of the AEF wrote to his wife, "Letty, stop sending me them nagging letters. I am 3000 miles from home and want to enjoy this war in peace".¹

The performance of military duty is neither exhausting nor onerous. This is, of course, excepting those in high command, for

¹ *The American Army in France*, by Gen. J. G. Harbord. Little, Brown.

whom war is no picnic. But for our typical soldier, barely normal intelligence is required, and life is comparatively easy. His duties are mechanical and easily learned, and once learned may be performed without thinking. Moreover, except when actually under fire, these duties do not occupy the soldier's time to the exclusion of all else. Naturally he has no worries in the way of food, clothing, or shelter. Mature men, put to these simple tasks, with some leisure and no responsibilities, tend to develop an irresponsible attitude of mind, not unlike that of an adolescent — which accounts, among other things, for the prevalence of practical jokes and ribald humor in the army.

The legend about the strictness of military discipline, particularly where military duty is not involved, is largely nonsense, and the officer as a fiendish tyrant exists only in the imaginations of the pacifists. Especially are the reins of discipline slackened behind active fronts, where it is assumed that considerable relaxation must be provided to compensate for the comparatively hard life at the front. For example, let us suppose that our hero, having spent a pleasant evening in the saloons, becomes involved in a brawl in the red-light

district, and is arrested. At home this would normally net him a fine and a term in jail, to say nothing of subsequent social ostracism. At worst in the army he will get a few days in the guardhouse and, far from being ostracized by his fellows, he will be regarded as somewhat of a hero. Finally — such are the vagaries of human thinking — when he returns home he may relate his adventure without fear of censure or reproach. In fact, it was expected of him, for the civilian public has long since learned to tolerate and even find amusement in the antics of the man in uniform, for he is not like other men.

In his memoirs, General Pershing refers to the late war as "the great adventure", which it was, not only for him but for the whole AEF. But probably few of them ever thought of the war in that way. Rather, as General Harbord puts it:

Men find a certain freedom in war, freedom from the entanglements of everyday routine, the oppression of regular hours of office, factory and shop, the struggle for daily bread — the mean and irksome routine of life.

In the United States the government, the newspapers, and the propagandists generally had been at great pains to describe the hardships and sufferings of the boys in the trenches — this, it was found,

greatly aided the bond sales. Thus, when the AEF returned, they were met at the dock by a public firmly convinced that they had been martyred to save the country. Since most of them did not have the courage to deny this, and few were so shameless as to elaborate on their "sufferings", they compromised by keeping silent—which was promptly interpreted as conclusive evidence of the hard times they had endured. The war had been so horrible that the veterans couldn't bear to talk about it. So the returning heroes did nothing to dispel the illusion, and settled back to enjoy the sympathy and the limelight for all it was worth. It was very pleasant.

The veterans had good reason to be content. In the beginning they had had little to risk or lose in the way of property, position, or reputation. Then the first days and, in Mr. Churchill's words, the opening of "a larger, nobler life"—an agreeable caress to the vanity. This passed; so did the pleasant novelty of the uniform, the curiosity in strange lands and people, all without regret, and were replaced by absorption into the ultra-masculine atmosphere of the army. Then the return home, the attention and the

sympathy. For the ambitious the basis had been laid for future political or business careers. For the rest, as the present generation well knows, political preferment, bonuses, pensions.

Thus it was in the World War and the wars that went before it, and thus it will be again, if on some future day we set out on another crusade to save the world from fascism. General Harbord indicates that the popularity of war lies in the fact that it offers to the masses an escape from humdrum reality. Perhaps the General overcomplicates the case. I suspect that the reason is even simpler—that it is, in fact, attractive for the same reasons which contribute to the permanent popularity of lodge meetings and conventions. For a war is a sort of super Elks convention in which all the bars are let down, and all the police permanently bought off—an institution which permits a man to be a hero and a public servant, and at the same time to enjoy himself. Therefore I find it very difficult to believe that any amount of propaganda, no matter how persuasively presented, will ever undermine the eternal popularity of war among the masses of the people.

THE CALENDAR IS OUT OF DATE

BY ANTHONY M. TURANO

WHEN Great Britain adopted the Gregorian Calendar, in 1752, making that year shorter by eleven days, irate Cockneys threatened a revolution to compel Parliament to "give us back our fortnight". To be sure, sophisticated moderns can easily perceive that no government can curtail a citizen's life by a stroke of the pen without following it with a drop of the axe. Yet the same affection for time-hallowed antiquities prevails in contemporary society. The absurd hodge-podge of months and days, invented by the Romans two thousand years ago, still regulates our economic and spiritual activities; and perennial headaches of varying intensity are stoically endured by all sections of the population.

If the housewife wishes to balance her budget, or resolve a personal question of progeny, she must pause to recite a stupid little rhyme about "Thirty days hath September". Grave legislators cannot fix terms of court, or the time for the discharge of civil obliga-

tions, except through such pitiful circumlocutions as the "first Monday after the first Sunday" of a certain month, and "if said day be a legal holiday, then the next succeeding day not a holiday". An employee who earns \$150 for twenty-four days of service in February may be succeeded by another man who receives identical pay for toiling twenty-seven days in March. As a public librarian points out, October 1935 had "25 per cent more work days than the shortest month of that year. . . . Expenses were increased but the library budget remained the same". The publisher of a weekly periodical promises to bring out fifty-two issues per annum. But the accumulation of odd days compels him to print a fifty-third number every five or six years, an expensive gift of which his subscribers are not even aware.

Without employing an expert to prorate and average his books, the shopkeeper who pays weekly wages is never sure whether he is in the black by an act of God or in