

Adding a Century to Creasy

FIFTEEN DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD. By Sir Edward S. Creasy. Edited by Robert Hammond Murray. Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co. 1943. 611 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by
COLONEL JOSEPH I. GREENE

SIR Edward Creasy, in giving a title to his book a century ago, used the word "decisive" in a historical sense. He included only battles which he thought had sharply decided the course of history. Mr. Murray, in adding nine battles to Creasy's original fifteen, has followed the same rule of selection.

A historian might feel that there have been still other battles which determined broad phases of the world's development, though few would argue that any of those now included should have been left out. The soldier, however, would be likely to pick a somewhat different list, for he commonly uses "decisive" in a different sense. In planning campaigns and battles the main idea is to strike the enemy at "the decisive point"—to hit him there suddenly, with great force in the blow. The selection of the decisive point is, of course, the crux of the matter. And the only proof that the right spot has been selected is the *decisive* defeat of the enemy, and in the end, the winning of the campaign or the war. Thus, to the soldier a decisive battle is more a great victory than a turning point in history.

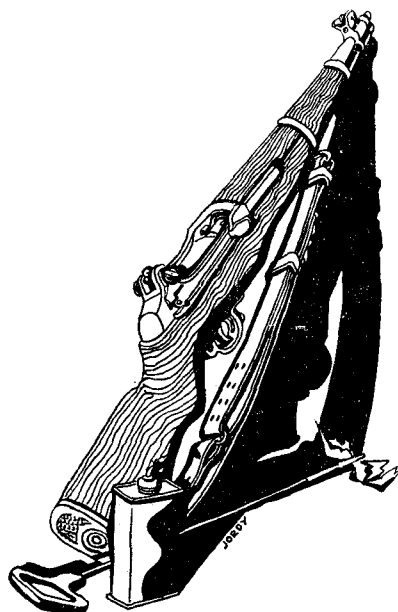
At times battles that were not great victories have been historically decisive. Creasy included Valmy, where the poorly organized armies of Revolutionary France surprised themselves and the rest of Europe by standing fast on some hilltops before the repeated Prussian attacks, and delivered a murderous defensive fire against them, till by nightfall the Prussians were too worn down to charge again. Mr. Murray, in bringing the Creasy list up to date, has included no battle from World War I as being historically decisive. That whole war brought no permanent decision, in either the historical or military sense, though Tannenburg is studied by military men as a classic victory. In the present war, which seems bound to bring a great turn in history, the vast battle of Russia in 1941, the earlier Battle of Britain, the great new onslaught we soon expect in Europe, and some later, large-scale Pacific fight, seem likely to be the fights that will have determined a great historical change.

All of Creasy's battles were fought

in Europe except Arbela, in which Alexander crushed the ancient Persian empire, and Saratoga, which was the turning point of our own Revolution. Three others Creasy included were successful attempts by European armies to destroy invading armies—The Metaurus, where the Romans turned away the Carthaginians; Tours, where the Franks limited the Mohammedan incursion to Spain; and Chalons, where the Huns of Attila were scattered. Mr. Murray goes on around the world in the nine battles he adds to Creasy's fifteen and includes the chief fight of Cortez with the Aztecs; Quebec, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg; Ayacucho, the final battle of the South American wars for independence; and Mukden, which awakened Asia to the fighting abilities of her peoples. I think that the military history of Asia is not properly covered in the work of either author of the book. There were several hard Asiatic conflicts, ancient, medieval, and modern, the winning and losing of which had important results for the world.

It is, of course, our intense interest in today's war that has made a new edition of Creasy especially desirable. Creasy enabled the lay reader, through his dramatic simplification of military events, to grasp how battles were fought as well as what their long-term results have been. Mr. Murray, in extending Creasy's work through another century, is successful in doing the same thing, though his somewhat less sober style does offer a contrast.

Battles are not for soldiers alone. They are, in total warfare especially, a test of the alertness of whole peoples to self-preservation. "Decisive Battles" has particular value as a reminder that the onslaught of conquest has come from many directions, and that unready nations have seldom lived.



"Y
Young spirits awake we have in our own land. Norman Rosten's is one. He writes of today in powerful measure—of Bataan... of the heroic city of Sevastopol in siege. It is good to have a book like this alive to great issues... He knows where lie the heroes... He knows what price this age is paying that the spirit of man may go on. This is a good book, like an automatic, compact and hard."

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

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THE Fourth Decade

AND OTHER
POEMS

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The Phoenix Nest

I AM grateful to Ivan Swift of Detroit, Michigan, for introducing me to Chet Shafer's contributions to *The Detroit News*, from Three Rivers. Shafer's breezy stuff, I prophesy, will blow all over the country one of these days. He has the genuine homely touch! One of his "dispatches," the other day, spoke of what Jess Fredericks said when he heard a freight train going north on the Old L.S.&M.S. as it whistled for a far crossing:

"I like t' hear train whistles," he declared, "I wish't they was more of 'em—t' hear. About all we git now is a couple a day—when th' freight goes north t' Kalamazoo—an' turns around an' comes back. Sometimes th' engineer blows for all th' crossin's an' gives 'em a good long blow . . . an' then ag'in he gits stingy an' just gives a couple a toots . . . which ain't much account . . . I always remember th' whistle of th' Four-Forty-Eight . . . comin' in

from th' north . . . just gittin' on t'ord dark . . . an' she'd come around th' curve along th' bank a th' millpond with her headlight on . . . an' th' lights in th' cars . . . just a roarin' . . . an' th' whistle goin' low an' O my! Gosh, that was nice t' hear."

This gave me a hunch to drop a line to my old friend, Frank M. Warner, Traveling Railroad Secretary for the National Council of the Young Men's Christian Associations. Frank knows something about trains and has traveled on a good many, and also is a great collector of folk-ballads. I asked him what he remembered about train whistles in the latter. He answered:

The first, of course,—

The switchman knew by the engine's moans
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.

Another easy one—

Going down the grade making ninety miles an hour
His whistle broke into a scream—
Frank Proffitt in Pick Britches Valley, N. C., sang "The Runaway Train" which paints a wild picture with
The runaway train came down the track
The whistle wide—the throttle back.

Frank also sang the well known tune which gives such a lonesome far-off feeling—standing on a mountain and listening—

Down in the valley, valley so low,
Late in the evening, hear the train blow.

And then there is a line from a "hurt-feeling" song of very old Aunt Armise, a former slave girl in Suffolk, Virginia. She sang

I wish to the Lord the train would blow
And carry me back where I was befo'

One of the best I know comes from that very good hobo song written by Post and Norton which really talks in railroad terms. The title is "The Gila Monster Route." This is a gem—

When she hove in sight far up the track
She was working steam, with her brake shoes slack.
She hollered once at the whistle post
Then she flitted by like a frightened ghost.

But the one that tops 'em all to my mind is this verse from a song sung to me by Private Richard O. Hamilton, late of Governors Island—a boy from down yonder. This is the prize—

The screamin' of a steamboat never stirs my soul
The roarin' of a ari-plane drives me cold.

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