

papers examined, if no worse fate has befallen them.

In justice to the officers of the *Venturous*, the *Bernice*, and the *Danaë*, it must be stated that they received me with all possible politeness and good fellowship, and did everything in their power to make my detention as little irksome as possible. The sole exception to this treatment

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was Commander Smithies, who paid the ill-omened visit to my room in the hotel at Reval in company with the *Times* correspondent, and who afterwards accompanied me on the kidnapping expedition to Björkö.

I have yet to receive any explanation of the gross outrage of my arrest and detention.

THREE BRITISH CRITICISMS OF LUDENDORFF

I. BY HILAIRE BELLOC

It is a just criticism, though not necessarily a complaint, to be directed against nearly all memoirs of war that they neglect the military art. They usually err either by being too rhetorical in what should be a severely intellectual process or—much more often—by being too personal.

For those who, like myself, have an interest in military history *per se* (just as one may have an interest in chess or pure mechanics), the first thing attempted when one comes across a military memoir is the discovery therein of certain events, 'key points.' We already know, say, eight factors out of a formula composed of ten factors, but the two unknown factors lend all its interest to the problem.

Now my complaint is that memoirs written by generals as a rule shirk these 'key points,' and I find the memoirs of General von Ludendorff in the English translation which has been placed before me no exception to the rule.

To show how true this is I will take

what I think everyone will admit to be three main key points in the story of the war:

(1) The chief point of all, which determines the nature of the victory of the Marne, which gives its shape to the whole war, is this:

Was that victory produced by the smashing of the Prussian Guard by Foch just east of the Marshes of St. Gond in the late afternoon of Wednesday, September 9, 1914, or had a general order of retreat *already* proceeded from German headquarters, and was the fighting in the centre, east of the Marshes of St. Gond, no more than a delaying action after such an order had been given? Well, I turn to the pages before me and I find, to be quite honest, nothing about it!

The only allusion to the matter at all is on page 69 of the English edition, and it has exactly two points and two only in the midst of a mass of generalities: (a) A series of remarks which are, so far as military history goes, valueless. The absence of two German Army Corps from the West (the Guard Reserve Corps and the XI Active) 'had made itself felt with

fatal results.' That belongs to what I shall have to allude to again in this brief notice—the nonsense in the book. It is nonsense to say that the Germans, with their vast numerical superiority, were defeated because of this 3 per cent or, at most, 4 per cent difference in their acting battle-line strength. It is nonsense to say that the extreme right wing ought to have been reinforced by a corps from Alsace-Lorraine. There was not time for a tithe of such a movement. (b) A statement on the top of page 70—'The order to retreat from the Marne was issued, whether on good grounds or not I have never been able to decide.' But, great heavens! the whole point is *when* that order to retreat was given. We all know that the order was given; it is not worth writing down the mere fact that it was given. The whole view of the history of modern Europe turns upon the hour in which it was given; and the anxious reader, who is really interested in history and not in private affairs, seeing such a sentence reads on and finds no more than that: 'It was obvious the war would now be a long one and require enormous sacrifices.'

(2) The second critical point which I take for my example is the breaking of the Russian lines in Galicia. Here was one of the critical moments of the war. Here it was that there appeared that prime new factor of industrial effort which was so to mark the war. The breaking of the Russian lines at the end of April and beginning of May, 1915, was an historical event of the very first magnitude. It might be compared to the introduction of firearms as against bows and arrows. It was a turning point in military history. It showed that the civilian industrial effort behind an army would in future be a determining factor. We all know

that, but what we want to know is exactly *how* that factor proved determinant; for we must attribute the prolongation of the war, the break up of Russia, the ultimate entry of America, and all the vast consequence thereof to this one fatal date in the Spring of 1915. Military history asks exactly what happened; in what way; why the Russian line was broken by instruments which, though novel in their degree, had failed to break the line of the Western Allies. Military history wants to know why the vast superiority—at that moment—of Prussia and her Allies in *matériel*, which was still just as pronounced in the West as in the East, succeeded in the East while it failed in the West.

Well, I turn to this definite technical question, and I learn (on page 140) that Mackensen had 'instructions early in May' to attack and crush the flank of the Russian armies. That is nonsense, for the attack was delivered before the end of April. I learn that Mackensen was a 'distinguished man of great accomplishments, and a brilliant soldier,' which is so much hot air, and that his 'deeds will live in history for all time,' which they will not. I learn that he had 'a keen intellect and a clear judgment,' which is true but not informing. But on the only points of real interest to a military historian—how and why the lines broke—I learn nothing. All I get is (on page 145), 'In the early hours of May 2, General von Mackensen, in a *well-prepared* attack' (my italics), 'brilliantly carried out by the troops, broke through the Russian front on the middle Dunajec.' You might just as well tell me that Wellington and Blücher won the Battle of Waterloo. What military history desires to understand is the *nature* of that capital success which might very

well have won the war for the enemy. And again we have nothing.

(3) I turn to my third critical point, the nature of the German defeat on the sector of Verdun. The known factors are by this time commonplace: the enemy achieved something of a surprise. His object was to crush in the French lines against the river and so to produce chaos. It was a sort of Friedland on a large scale. It did not come off. The blow was parried on the fourth day at a sufficient distance from the very insufficiently bridged obstacle of the Meuse, and the great Verdun offensive from that moment was a failure. It turned into a mere business of attrition, and, therefore, the rapidly increasing industrial power of the Allies rightly regarded it as a defeat for their opponent. But what checked it? How was it checked? What went wrong? You will not find from Ludendorff's *Memoirs* any hint of what it was that happened before Verdun. True, he was not himself engaged in that action; but since that action determined, as a second step, the shape of the war, and, next after the Battle of the Marne, determined its final issue, we might expect some view at least of the causes of the breakdown; but we do not get it.

The second volume of Ludendorff's *Memoirs* presents more points of interest than the first, partly because it deals with the period during which he was the Chief Commander (in reality) on the enemy's side; partly because it deals with certain critical events of which it is absolutely necessary to give some sort of military account, and which cannot be dealt with simply as a piece of politics.

Nevertheless, I find in this second volume, as I did in the first, a deplorable absence of matter for military history; and (for the purposes of military history at least) a much too con-

siderable proportion of domestic criticism. The author would probably reply to such a judgment that he was not writing the book for the service of military history but for the service of his own society, the Prussian officer class, to which he is naturally attached, and in order to point morals for that society and give it a chance of recovery. It is for this reason, for instance, that he always belittles the Austrian Germans and talks artificially of the Prussianized Northern German Empire as a 'nation,' and it is for this reason that he speaks so strongly about the weakening of civilian morale by the Social Democrats — a continual theme throughout his book.

But I cannot help regarding this second volume, as I did the first, from the point of view of military history, and finding it therein exceedingly deficient. If you buy a railway guide you want to know at what time the trains start and arrive. It may have advertisements and even pictures, but they are not the main part of such a work; and I do think that in military memoirs the substance of military history is what the reader has a right to demand.

Everyone will agree that in the second period of the war (1917 and 1918) five points are of special importance to military history:

(1) What was the cause of the breakdown of the great French attack in the spring of 1917?

(2) What caused the enemy success at Caporetto — usually ascribed to the production of a new tactical instrument on the part of the Germans, who profited by the relief the Russian breakdown had given them?

(3) How did the great rupture of the Allied line on the front of the English fifth army in March, 1918, fail? Why was it held up before Amiens?

(4) Why was the subsequent attack

on the Lys delivered, and what made it fail?

(5) Much the most important of all — what happened on the German side to lead to the breakdown of their front between Soissons and Château Thierry on July 18, 1918, a breach which, as was clear from that moment onward, decided all the rest of the war and made defeat inevitable?

As to the first — the breakdown of Nivelle's attack in 1917 and the defeat of his armies — we get sound general judgment, but no particulars. General Ludendorff describes quite justly (upon page 422) the strategic objects which the French had designed to reach, and which they failed to reach. He also says — what is probably true in the nature of things (though we have as yet no official confirmation of it from the French or British side) — that the British effort on the Vimy Ridge was meant to be the containing effort; and the French effort to the south was meant to be the decisive or turning effort. He justly describes the nature of the French success at the Moronvilliers hills, but he does not (where he should, on page 426) explain exactly *what* the French failure was tactically.

To put the matter in concrete terms: I have myself known men who were present in this great action to ascribe its failure to things as different as bad formation, the improper use of armored offensive mobile weapons; lack of coördination between the right and left; finally (*and this was said on all sides*), it may have been due to gross interference by parliamentarians with the soldiers. On the last point Ludendorff could tell us nothing, but he could tell us a good deal about the others, and he does not. He has one sentence which is interesting but not sufficiently detailed — 'Our losses in men and material were extraordinarily high.' I

should have thought — purely *a priori* — that proportionately to the efforts of the offensive the losses of the defensive in that great action were not so severe. If the author means by this sentence that the defensive very nearly came to a breaking point, and if further and more detailed evidence later bears this out, then the general impression now prevailing in France that Parliament was responsible for the defeat would be confirmed.

Upon the second point, that is, Caporetto, we are honestly told nothing at all! I mean nothing more than is common knowledge to the whole world. In the brief description of that tremendous victory the author of these memoirs seems chiefly concerned with running down the southern Germans commanded from Vienna in order to contrast them unfavorably with the northern Germans, to which he himself belongs. Caporetto was not decisive of the war, but it was very nearly decisive. I am confident that when the history of the war is recorded by posterity, Caporetto will stand out as the greatest individual achievement of the war, with the sole exception of Foch's decisive and final counter-blow of July 18, 1918, which won it.

The third point, the great German break through of March, 1918, against the Fifth British Army, is treated with more particularity, as might well be expected, for it was, until July of the same year, by far the chief event of the war. It is curious to note, by the way, that in this description the fog, which was regarded on our side as a great asset to the enemy, seems to have been regarded upon his side as a drawback — but that is a minor point. The really interesting point, however, is to discover why the rush was checked before Amiens, and though Ludendorff tells us here more than he usually does of the enemy's aims and methods

(pages 598 to 602) he none the less hardly explains that final check. For instance, he tells us nothing whatever — not a single word — about the filling of the gap between the British Fifth Army and the French left, which really did the trick. He does tell us what is interesting, *that even as late as March 28 he himself still counted on getting through and reëstablishing open warfare*. In conclusion we have the despairing phrase: 'It was an established fact that the enemy's resistance was beyond our strength,' but that is not a military explanation. Why was the resistance of an inferior defensive beyond the strength of a superior offensive on this occasion? Was it because communications could not be kept up over the devastated land west of St. Quentin? That may well have been the main reason. Indeed, the German success in bringing up water alone was a marvel. Was it because lack of discipline was already beginning to break down in the German Army? I fancy there was something in that. In the mutual recriminations which have appeared beyond the Rhine, and especially in Ludendorff's own pages, one gets startling admissions which show the inability of the German temper to stand a strain in the fashion in which the western nations can stand it. Read the passage on page 641 about Lichnowsky's Memoirs, or 100 pages earlier, on page 541, the passage upon German morale even before the offensive of 1918. Or, again, read the description of the Divisions melting away through desertion even in the spring of 1918. Or read those remarkable words on page 683: '*The retiring troops meeting a fresh Division going bravely into action shouted out things such as "Blacklegs" and "You are prolonging the war."* *The officers in many instances had lost their influence and allowed themselves to be swept along with*

the rest.' They are but chance revelations, but they are very illuminating.

Next we turn to the question why that strange diversion was made toward the Kennel Hills: the Battle of the Lys, which went so far to exhaust the remaining forces of the enemy after he had failed in his great attack on Amiens.

I think the true explanation has been well put by Major Grasset in his short study on the strategy of Marshal Foch, which forms the preface to the excerpts from that soldier's writings (about to be published by Messrs. Chapman & Hall in a translation which I am just completing). Major Grasset says, briefly, that the enemy could not for the moment again attack on a front of 40,000 yards, so he chose a shorter front of 25,000 yards with the object of crushing in the British left, throwing the British army back on the sea and obtaining the Channel ports. It was a 'strategic second best.' I think I am right in saying that no strategical second best has ever succeeded in the whole history of war.

In his description of the Battle of the Lys the author does make an allusion to the critical point, but not a sufficient one. He says, in the last lines of page 607: 'On the left, at Givenchy and Festubert, we were held up. The result was not satisfactory.' Now that is all right as far as it goes, but it is quite insufficient. The heroic tenacity of one British Division — from Lancashire if I remember right — turned the whole of that affair. The enemy could not push forward thoroughly so long as the neck of his salient remained narrow, and narrow it would remain so long as the corner at Festubert was held against him. It was held, as we know; and to the men who held Festubert in April, 1918, we very largely owe the final victory in this war.

Well, then, one turns from the ac-

count of the Lys to the account of the final great affair — the German breakdown before Rheims and the famous counter-stroke of July 18, which is one of the few capital dates in the history of Europe.

The German line of attack before it went forward on what was to be the supreme day, July 15, 1918, lay like a broadly open pair of compasses with the ruined town of Rheims in the angle thereof and each limb about 25 miles long. At the extreme right of the right-hand limb a sort of flank guard curled back from Château Thierry to Soissons. It was on that flank that Foch unexpectedly struck and won on the fourth day of the battle. It was as though an army which lay from Croydon to just north of Windsor, and thence round, slightly deflecting from the straight line, to somewhere beyond Newbury, had the task of advancing southward with its western flank covered by a line of troops running north from Newbury across the Downs to Oxford. In the same way the German line lay in front of Rheims in a broad angle, and, beyond Château Thierry, sharply curled round north in a sort of flank guard to Soissons. The Germans meant the main army to go forward on either side of Rheims and the flank between Château Thierry and Soissons to hold. The main army failed to get forward in front of Rheims because the French army, under Gouraud, organized a very thin defensive in depth, quite deceived the attack, and shattered it in the first seven hours. Still they might have held upon their flank. They did not. They were here completely surprised. Foch had secretly accumulated against that flank great forces under Mangin and Degoutte, French and American, and fell upon it with crushing effect; an effect so crushing that from that moment onward the destruction of

the German army continued uninterruptedly till the whole Prussian organization, civil and military, had to capitulate.

Now the interesting thing is that Ludendorff tells us in one place that the attack was foreseen. Frankly it is impossible to believe it. Though he assures us the attack was foreseen, I can, I think, from his own text prove a sheer contradiction, and I believe any reasonable student of military history will bear me out. He tells us (on page 666) with regard to the front of the Marne that 'on the 17th (of July) the retreat was fixed for the night between the 20th and the 21st.' I say it is not credible that *in the expectation of an attack between Soissons and Château Thierry on the 18th* a retreat would have been planned for the 20th and 21st. I do not believe, and no one will ever believe that those two assertions can both be true. Either the order for retreat was not given (I think it was) or, much more probable, the imminence of the Franco-American attack in the flank was not foreseen, and came as a great surprise. Ludendorff says, with good proof (upon page 667) that he was opposed to the extraordinary plan which the German General Staff had conceived, after the failure by Rheims, of attacking again in Flanders! At any rate he was at Avesnes at 2 o'clock in the morning of that fatal day, the 18th, and the only new point he gives us as the history of the great surprise (for such I still take it to be) is that a particular German Division which was specially relied upon, southwest of Soissons, broke early against all expectation. He is wrong when he says (upon page 670) that Foch's intention was to cut off the salient. The salient was far too broad for that. Foch's intention was to attack, to dent one side, to compel a rush of enemy troops to aid retirement from the dented salient,

and then to attack again elsewhere, continuously, uninterruptedly, increasingly; so that the enemy, reeling from the first blow, should not rally, and that intention Foch and the Allies carried out in an unbroken chain of success up to the armistice.

On page 671 Ludendorff tells us that one of the reasons for the breakdown of July 18th was that the men had ceased to believe in the possibility of an attack, and oddly enough, upon this page he does call the movement a surprise. He also blames influenza and monotonous diet; as I said of Caporetto; but such phrases of excuse may always be neglected.

One rises from the description with the general judgment that the enemy was upon that memorable summer morning in the high cornfields of the Upper Ourcq and the Tourdenois completely outmanœuvred, and that his then Chief Commander still bears toward that decisive stroke an attitude of bewilderment.

II. BY MAJOR-GENERAL SIR F. MAURICE

THERE are two Ludendorffs in this book, Ludendorff the soldier and Ludendorff the director of Germany's military policy. The soldier gives us a straightforward and, except where it is marred by expositions of Prussian mentality, a convincing account of the military operations with which he was concerned. The would-be statesman is querulous and insincere; he has learned nothing from defeat, and is occupied in trying to shift the blame for disaster on to the shoulders of others.

The soldier shows himself to us as a deep and earnest student of his profession, a gallant man in action, a skillful organizer, and a tactician of great merit. His weakness was his truly

German failure to estimate correctly the forces arrayed against him. He did not appreciate either the power of resistance of the British army or its power of recovery from reverses; he did not appreciate the power of the British navy and of the British mercantile marine and its effect upon the transport of American troops across the Atlantic; he did not appreciate the endurance of France. Writing of the position just prior to America's entry into the war he says: 'Calculations pointed to a result favorable to us. It would thus be necessary, in order to transport 1,000,000 American soldiers in a reasonable time, to employ 5,000,000 tons of shipping space. Such a quantity of shipping, in view of the necessity for maintaining supplies to the Western Powers, could not be spared even temporarily.' We know that at the time of the armistice there were more than 2,000,000 American soldiers in Europe.

That psychological defect of overconfidence when things were, in appearance, going well, which beset all the German generals, vitiated the whole of Ludendorff's spring campaign of 1918. He believed that he could break through the trench barrier in the west, possibly with one, certainly with two or three great blows. There was in his strategy none of Foch's skill of fence, none of the preparation for the knockout blow, such as began on July 18 with the counter-attack in the second battle of the Marne and ended in St. Mihiel. Every blow from March 21 onward, save only von Hutier's abortive attempt to reach Compiègne in June, was meant to be a knockout blow, and was continued to the stage when he got little but heavy loss in return for his attacks. The result, following upon the bitter experiences of the German army in the west in 1917, was that Ludendorff exhausted his