

"WE'VE GOT HEINIE'S NUMBER"

—The American soldiers' rallying cry in France.

Written especially for TRENCH AND CAMP

By William Roscoe Thayer, Author of "The Collapse of the Superman"

NEXT to the folly of underrating your enemy's strength is the folly of overrating it. The generals have always taken the precaution to prepare against every possible surprise, including not merely a surprise attack, but new equipment and weapons and unexpected force.

A considerable source of power to Germany in the present war has been the idea which she has carefully cultivated among other nations that she is invincible. This idea summed up in the word "superman" passed up and down the world for a good while before the war. And so people began to accept it as true without looking into the facts. Now, I do not intend for a moment to belittle the achievements of modern Germany, but I wish to point out that these achievements are, no more the results of supermen than is a coral island the result of some amazing superinsect.

Bootlickers

It is, indeed, owing to the fact that Germans are, in many respects, backward, that they have been able to accomplish much that the unthinking mistake for supermannish. Their utter docility, their obsequiousness, their worship of the meanest noble who ranks above them, prove this. Among other peoples—the English and Scotch, the French, and Belgians, and Dutch, the Scandinavians, Italians and Americans—such servility was long ago outgrown, but it has prevailed among the Germans since the earliest times. It was the basis and core of feudalism, and on it the Kaiser and the junkers and the military pirates have built their hopes.

Evidently, if you have a whole people who believe anything you say and think just what you tell them to think, it is comparatively easy to make that people obey your orders. From the earliest record which we have, the Germans were fighters. Gradually, as they overcame the decadent Roman Empire they took on some of the Roman civilization and they even established a new empire, a mongrel kind of state, in which Christian ideals and old Roman and the barbarian German were mingled; but the Germanic tribes fought among each other and no permanent empire could be established. But the feudal idea, which was the utmost the German mind could evolve, penetrated them all and was transmitted from father to son just as a hereditary disease continues through many generations.

In the Northeast there lived a mixture of Asiatics—who were probably related in some way to the Taytars and Huns—of Slavs and of fragments of other Germanic tribes. These were the Prussians, the least civilized, the most sturdy and warlike and feudal of modern Germans. Partly by war and partly by marriage, Prussia became the property of the Hohenzollerns—a family of robber barons who made their way from South Germany up into the North. In the eighteenth century this family produced Frederick the Great, remarkable as a ruler, and most remarkable as a military commander. He was utterly without scruple; he invaded and robbed his neighbors' lands; he broke his oath; he shrank from no harshness at home or perfidy abroad. But he discerned that the Prussians with their obsequious nature, and their love of feudal routine, would make excellent soldiers, and so he converted Prussia into the most rigid military state of modern times.

Routes Prussians

When Frederick the Great died in 1786 he left the Prussian army as the best in Europe; but within twenty years, in the double battle of Jena and Auerstaedt, Napoleon utterly defeated it, sent the Prussian king and his court flying as fast as they could from Berlin, set panic in the heart of every Prussian and compelled that kingdom to make a humiliating peace. Jena gives the best indication of the Prussian militarist character; in victory it is insolent, boasting, merciless and cruel; in defeat it is panic-stricken, it cringes, it whimpers. I believe that the same traits persist in it today.

It took more than six years after Jena for the Prussians to recover their morale, and it was only when Napoleon had lost his armies and his prestige in the snows of Russia in 1812 that the Prussians dared to lift up their heads again. The next year they, in coalition with Russians, Austrians, Swedes and other Germans, defeated him at the battle of Leipzig. The coalition had 300,000 men, Na-

oleon had 180,000 and added to this disproportion against him was the depressing effect produced by the desertion of the Saxon army, which went over to the allies. The allied commander-in-chief was the Austrian Prince Schwarzenberg, but the Prussians, with their characteristic modesty, claimed the lion's share of the laurels and, as they now write history, you would suppose that the victory of Leipzig was wholly their work. At the battle of Waterloo it was undoubtedly the coming up of the Prussian army under Blücher which completed the defeat of Napoleon.

Berlin's System

Thenceforward, for nearly half a century, Prussia went on in peace to develop her military system. She organized her system of education so that this should be a part of the military, and in this way every Prussian on reaching manhood had been taught absolute loyalty to the sovereign and the most rigid military obedience. The deepest instinct in the Prussian nature—just for war—was fostered by every kind of teaching; and gradually the idea spread that, just as the Hohenzollern had acquired lands and wealth by fighting in the old days, so successful war would now have a similar result.

In 1862 Count Bismarck became the chief minister of the Prussian king. He believed thoroughly in the doctrine that Might makes Right, so that if a nation succeeds in piratical crimes, nobody can call it to account. Among the many states which then made up the German confederation, Prussia and Austria were rivals, Austria having the advantage. Bismarck planned to make Prussia the chief German state, and he did this by forcing war upon Austria and beating her in the battle of Sadona in 1866. That accomplished, he proposed to make Prussia the head of a German Empire which should include all of the German states outside of Austria. So he picked a quarrel with France, which was wrongly regarded as the dominant power of western Europe and having destroyed her imperial armies and forced her to make peace, he was able in 1871 to set up the German Empire.

From that time forward Prussia worked to be, in every sense, the mistress of Germany. Theoretically, each state was independent, but in all imperial matters the Prussian votes outweighed those of the smaller states. Prussian education and the Prussian army system prevailed throughout the empire. In cunning and subtle ways the king of Prussia, who was also the German emperor, hired non-Prussians to feel a stronger allegiance to him than to their own petty monarchs. If you were a conspicuous professor at Munich, the Kaiser saw to it that you were invited to fill a professor's chair at the University of Berlin. If you had made a reputation as a painter, or writer, or sculptor, or musician, in one of the smaller capitals, you were sure to be drawn to Berlin. The great financiers had their natural centre at Berlin. And so of all the chief organs of the military, political, intellectual and industrial forces of the empire. Once at Berlin you were stealthily Prussianized; by blandishment which took the form of promotions, red and iron crosses and eagles, a judicious bestowal of the title "Von," before which every German falls down and worships, and of various other marks of imperial favor; or, if you proved a slow acceptor of the Prussian virus you were stealthily punished—you didn't go on in your profession, you weren't asked to paint the Kaiser's portrait, you got no concessions for your business plans, you were aware that an unseen power thwarted you at every turn; and then you understood that the only sure road to success was to bow low before the Kaiser and his deputies, and you succumbed. Treitschke, the most famous of modern German historians, illustrates this perfectly. He was a Saxon and a strong Liberal, but on being invited to the University of Berlin he became the most virulent supporter of Prussia's leadership in the German Empire, and the most vehement advocate of despotism, and until his death in 1896 he did more than any other German "intellectual" to inject into the university men, the Kaiser and the upper military class the idea of German world dominion.

Test of Greatness

The doctrine of the Superman is simply the expression of colossal conceit. The Germans base it on the theory of the "survival of the fittest."

Unfortunately for the world, they applied to human life, races and nations the theory which scientific men thought they could prove in the animal kingdom, where, they argue, the beast or bird which lives is the fittest to live; the weak die. Among mankind, however, this rule does not apply; if it did, the only persons now surviving would be prize fighters. But muscle is not the only test among men; there is the intellectual test, and the moral test, which are immensely more important than the physical. No doubt, in Napoleon's army there were 100,000 men physically stronger than he, and yet he possessed a power by which he could control and lead the 100,000. The Germans, however, laid their claims to being Supermen, not merely on the physical superiority of their soldiers but also on the superior mental qualities of their intellectual leaders. They claimed to be the best men of science, for instance, and they pretended that the fact that Germans had had great poets and musicians and philosophers was a further proof that Germans were Supermen. In fact, however, all the great German poets—from Goethe and Schiller to Heine; all the great German musicians—from Bach and Beethoven to Wagner; and all the great German philosophers—from Leibnitz and Kant to Hegel and Schopenhauer, lived and worked before the mad dream of German world-dominion had been suggested, and Wagner, the only one of them who lived after the rise of Prussia, detested Prussia and the Prussians and lost no opportunity to ridicule or to denounce them.

Germans Follow

In science itself the Germans have been and are extraordinarily patient investigators and very nimble applicators of other men's inventions and discoveries. Run over the list of the truly great modern scientists. Who are the men who have announced fundamental principles? Darwin, who gave the keynote of modern thought and modern science, was an Englishman; Louis Pasteur, who showed the true method of biology, was a Frenchman; Michael Faraday, an Englishman, was the master of all students of electricity, and Joseph Lister, another Englishman, led the way in antiseptics. Morton, an American, first demonstrated the usefulness of ether as an anaesthetic, and Sir James Simpson, a Scot, popularized the use of chloroform. Three Englishmen, one Scot, one American, one Frenchman and no German! When we come to the most important inventors, the applicators of science to invention, what do we find? Fulton, an American, invented the steamboat; Stevenson, an Englishman, the railroad locomotive; Morse, an American, the telegraph; Marconi, an Italian with an Irish mother, wireless telegraphy; Bell, an American, the telephone. And in the field of war itself, to which the Germans have devoted more time and attention than have all the other nations, the leaders have not been German. Holland, an American, put the first submarine into the water and devised the first submarine torpedo; two American brothers, the Wrights, set flying the first practical airplanes; Maxim, another American, invented the machine gun; Bessemer, an Englishman, discovered the process for making steel, without which Krupp guns would not have existed. One hundred and forty years ago, Montgolfier, a Frenchman, invented the balloon, of which the Zeppelin is a modern derivative. Even trench warfare was not a German discovery.

Not Supermen

Unless the definition of a Superman be that he is a creature who copies ordinary men's inventions and the basic formulas of science, the German has no right to the title. But, you may ask, does not his superiority in war make him a Superman? I reply, no! If a musical people, after devoting sixty or eighty years to music, succeeded in creating a very good orchestra, should you think it remarkable that that orchestra could outplay any group of musicians hastily got together in a country which was not only non-musical but had been devoting its energy in altogether different fields? Should you expect even the Germans, if they were suddenly transplanted to our great West and forced to compete in the agriculture on a grand scale, which the Americans have developed there and the Germans have never practised

at home, should you expect them to be able to compete on equal terms with our agriculturists? Hardly! And you would certainly never claim that our farmers were Supermen.

The parallel between these supposed cases and that of the German army and its competitors is very close. The Germans have made for fifty years their army their chief concern. Everything German—science, politics, religion, education, invention—has been devoted to that end. What wonder, therefore, that the German War-Lord can put millions of troops into the field in a month. Whereas, the English or the Americans, who have devoted their energies to quite different objects, were able at an emergency to mobilize only small forces.

All experience shows that if the English or the Americans competed for fifty years at a time with the Germans in any field (except in the cloud-land of metaphysics), the Germans would not surpass them. The list of names which I have just given proves this.

Not Invincible

Therefore, do not fear the German soldiers as invincible. Their excellence is the result, not of anything miraculous, not of any Supermannish quality in them, but of long training and of rigid discipline. They accomplish results in the same slow, patient way in which the coral insects build up their reef.

Two most important lessons must be drawn from our brief survey of the Germans. First, their so-called efficiency has been arrived at by careful planning, long practice and strict discipline; and it can be equaled, or surpassed, by any other people who imitate it with equal zeal. So you must not sit down and assume that the Germans are Supermen by some gift of Providence which has been denied to you.

Next, do not assume that the German armies are invincible and that the German soldiers are individually born to be better soldiers than those of any other nation. So far as they are superior now is due to their lifelong military training. This statement is confirmed by the fact that in all her modern wars Prussia (and later Germany) has never won a battle, even-handed, against her enemies. These are the figures: "In 1866, in the war between Prussia and Austria, the Prussians had 221,000 troops at the decisive battle of Sadowa, the Austrians had only 200,000. In the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the inequalities were still greater. At Woerth, the Germans numbered 84,000, the French 39,000. At Reichshofen, the Germans 180,000, the French 45,000. At St. Privat, the Germans 80,000, the French 18,000. At Sedan, the Germans 220,000, the French 100,000. These figures pay a high tribute to the German strategy which always contrived to bring a larger force than the enemy's into battle; they do not, however, exalt the German soldier in a man-to-man contest with foreign foes."

Will to Win

The same numerical disparity in favor of the Germans has been seen throughout the present war. At the battles of Charleroi and Mons, at La Fère Champenoise, where the great Foch drove his army corps through the German centre and won the victory of the Marne; in the engagements before Nancy, in the defense of Verdun, at Ypres, when the English, who had only one man to five of the Germans, blocked the first great onslaught, down to the recent drive on the West Front, where fourteen British divisions were pitted against forty-two German divisions, the German General Staff has always taken care to have a superior force on their side before going into fight. This is obviously a cardinal rule in warfare; but the results have proved that the superior German numbers cannot always or often defeat the Allies and that the individual German soldier, for all his longer training, is not necessarily a better fighter than his antagonists.

Accordingly, I close, as I began, urging my American countrymen, who have the great privilege of defending the cause of civilization on the battlefield, neither to despise nor underestimate the Germans, nor to regard them as Supermen to be feared. Learn all you can of their methods and improve upon them. Will to win! Remember that you are defending the holiest cause which men ever fought for. Remember that you are the instruments through whom Right and Justice shall prevail throughout the world.

