

Italian Disaster Prolongs War

Allies Look to America to Fill Up the Gaps Caused By Heavy Losses on Italian Front—"When Will War End?" Answered By These Experts.

By JOHN L. BALDERSTON

[The reader should remember that the following article on the military situation in Europe was written by John L. Balderston in London on November 3, before the British drove a wedge through the Hindenburg line last Tuesday and before the Kerenky government in Russia was overthrown. Mr. Balderston calculated, and rightly, that the allies must take some troops from the west front to the aid of Italy. He did not foresee that the Germans would also detach some of their best troops from the west front for the Italian campaign. Above all, he could not foretell the astonishing results of the grand assault of the tanks supported by infantry and cavalry in the Cambrai sector. After he wrote this story the Russian situation grew worse, but the driving power of the British army is in no wise diminished, apparently, by the Italian collapse and the consequent need of reinforcements for the protection of Piedmont and Lombardy.]

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**T**HE disaster that has fallen upon the Italian armies has prolonged the war, if the war is to end in a victory for the allies. All the dreams of peace during the winter or early spring which last week were entertained even in high quarters here, have vanished.

British and French statesmen and soldiers, who had already thrown in the scale every ounce of weight, military and economic, that they could bring to bear, are forced by the new and perilous situation to look to the United States for help.

In the last resort, it is America who must make good the losses on the Italian front. England and France can do no more than they are doing now. They are suffering part of their armies to Italy; but since all their force was already being expended, this means that the ability of the western allies to press for a decision on the main western front has been weakened in proportion to the amount of strength they have been compelled to detach to save the armies of Cadorna in the Venetian plain. America must make up the deficiency, and fill the places of the divisions that are sent to Italy.

The hard logic of the situation is inexorable. The United States is not even at war with Austria; but the victories won by Germans and Austrians in the gorges of the Isonzo, the foothills of the Carnic Alps and the plains of the Tagliamento increase the burden that America must bear. Unless the United States is willing, and able, to replace the lost Italian legions, with their mountains of captured material and acres of abandoned cannon, in addition to carrying out Washington's plans for warfare in Europe made before the Isonzo disaster, it will not be possible to win the war. And that, as Euclid says, is absurd.

**Not Ashamed to Call for Help.**  
It is a high tribute to the efforts already made by America that no doubt of her is felt in the comparatively narrow circles where the full force of the Austro-German offensive against Italy is thoroughly understood. "Of course you will see us through," is a common phrase. "We have nothing to be ashamed of in calling on you, for we are doing everything we can do, and so is France, and you know that it is so, and that what is happening is due to the disorganization of the east front," a soldier said to me.

What Uncle Sam is up against can be most clearly appreciated after a succinct statement of the strategic situation in Europe as it is understood in military quarters. The disorganization of the Russian armies this spring prevented the great combined offensive on all fronts that was expected to break through the Austro-German lines. "Not in my opinion," said Sir Douglas Haig last winter. "This was a terrible blow to the allied cause. It was necessary to try to get a decision in the west with little help from the east, and the year 1917 has seen a succession of French, British and Italian pushes, with very little success."

**German Losses in West.**  
The Germans have been terribly punished on the west front, and they have lost the ridges about Ypres, the Chimy ridge, the ridge of the Chemin de Dames, many thousands of cannon, and probably half a million men. But they have been able to hold on, as indeed was to be expected after the Russian collapse.

The coming evacuation of the Belgian coast, already discussed in these dispatches, with the loss of the great cities of the Belgian plain and a retreat to the Meuse, coupled with great blows delivered against Austria by General Cadorna, and with the famine in food and raw materials in Germany, made victory in 1918 seem not only possible but probable.

Great hopes were placed in the Italian offensive plans after the victory of the Bainsizza plateau in September, which General Maurice, director of military operations of the imperial general staff, said at the time he regarded as one of the most brilliant campaigns in the history of the world. So strongly were the allies convinced that Cadorna would be able not only to take Trieste, but to break through in the direction of Laibach and perhaps menace Vienna, that negotiations to supply him with some men and guns to take part in his triumph were in progress, if not concluded between British, French and Italian headquarters.

But all allied strategy was based on a certain assumption that proved ill-founded. It was accepted, after the Russian retreat in Galicia, that the Russian armies could not assume the offensive this year. But it was wrongly assumed that a certain minimum number of German and Austrian divisions, about 135 in all, providing about one man per yard along the whole eastern front, would have to be left on the east front by the enemy to guard against a sudden resumption of Russian activity.

**How Teutons Figured.**  
The German and Austrians either gambled that the Russians would do nothing even if freed by practically all troops in certain sectors, or their knowledge of conditions in Russia was more accurate than that in London and Paris. For they stripped their eastern front of far more than

the minimum number of troops which military prudence dictated must remain there. And, with the great masses of men thus obtained, they descended upon Italy.

Accordingly the blow that fell last week on the Isonzo at once altered the whole strategic situation in Europe, or, it would be better to say, in the world, since the United States has now as great a part in that strategic situation as any other country.

Considerations of honor no less than strategy compelled England and France to rush to the rescue. Italy is reeling under the onset of practically the whole Austrian army and some of the kaiser's best storm troops, and Italy must be saved. If Italy were to be forced out of the war, the entente would lose some 2,000,000 soldiers—a number as great as the United States at the best can put into the theatre of operations by the end of next year.

Whatever the course of the campaign in the Italian plains, the strategy of the war has undergone a profound alteration, to the advantage of the enemy. Only a great disaster suffered by the invading legions of the two emperors similar to that which overtook Cadorna in the mountains could alter that fact. The Germans have been able, by using troops that ought to be employed on the east front, to relieve the pressure on the west front, where their armies were in a critical condition, perhaps in deadly peril. Whether the allies stop them in Italy on this, that, or the other river cannot cancel their strategic success. The gaps on the west front cannot be filled by French reserves. Americans well know why. And England, too, for all her proud reticence, has no men to spare.

**Must Increase Our Efforts.**

But America has the men. It is up to America to revise her program, to increase her efforts. Only so can the balance be restored and the enemy defeated. The stern, brutal facts of the situation as I have set them down can be faced by a great people who have not yet begun to fight. Perhaps famine in Germany, perhaps revolution, will upset all strategic judgments and calculations. But we must not count on unknown quantities, if we want to win the war.

**When Will War End?**

As Britain and the opinions now entertained in competent circles regarding the military outlook, I am able to give the answer made by three leading soldiers now in London to the question, "When will the war end?"

**Gen. Creagh's View.**

General Sir O'Moore Creagh, V. C., Lord Kitchener's successor as commander-in-chief in India, said, "Events have so confounded prophecy that he would be a rash man who would today state a date. Everybody who has been tempted to predict the earliest date, from the kaiser, who promised his soldiers that they would be back in Germany before the fall of the leaves in 1914, to the Russian General Brusiloff, who thought that 1916 would see it through."

"I am granted that certain conditions are fulfilled, it is fairly safe to venture this prophecy. In the past the trouble has been that its have not come off."

"Assuming that a disciplined and reinforced Russian army faces the enemy in the coming spring, and by its pressure holds up some 150 German and Austrian divisions, then, in the light of America's very substantial aid in men and aeroplanes next year, probably the winter of next year should bring Europe's agony to an end."

"On the other hand, if by misfortune the Russian army should further weaken, enabling from 40 to 50 German divisions with their complements of guns and aeroplanes to be transported west, then the war may be prolonged for another two years at the earliest, but over before November, 1918; at the latest I cannot imagine hostilities extending beyond November, 1919. Of the two views I am more inclined to believe in the former than in the latter. Much will depend on Russia; much on our ability, in co-operation with America and France, to make ourselves absolutely supreme in the air. Given this supremacy and no possibility of any large exodus of German forces east shall have the Belgian coast in the early summer and that thereafter developments will march very rapidly."

"The weather has been atrocious for Sir Douglas Haig's plans. If it suddenly takes a permanent turn for the better, which we can hardly expect, it may be that we shall complete this winter the recovery of the ground to provide us with the ideal springboard for the liberation of Flanders. If so, that will make a decision in the late autumn of 1918 all the more certain."

**What Gen. Gurke Says.**

The same question was asked General Gurke, general-in-chief of all the Russian armies of Russia just before the revolution, who recently came to London, after being deprived of his command for writing a letter of sympathy to the czar after his late master's enforced abdication. General Gurke said: "The situation depends on the rehabilitation of the Russian and Italian armies and on the rapidly with which the United States can put properly trained and equipped troops, able to fight Germans on equal terms, in the line in the west."

"Naturally I know more than I can say about the Russian armies. As to Italy and America, I can only judge from the reports that were placed before me in Russia, and from what I have heard since came to England."

"Provided that the allies are not subjected to another setback like the Russian revolution, I think the war will be over in the autumn of 1918. Although I am very strongly of the opinion that Germany has lost the war in that she has failed to achieve what she set out to accomplish, it would be disastrous if the allies slackened up under the delusion that the war was won beyond doubt. The Russian revolution has given the Germans the opportunity successfully to undertake operations of a magnitude as a set-off to the continual pressure on their lines in France and Belgium."

"Within the next two months I shall be greatly surprised if the allied force in the Balkans is not sub-

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jected to very violent attacks from a combined German, Austrian and Bulgarian army. Perhaps an attack may be made on the British force in Mesopotamia. It came to my knowledge some time ago that the German high command endeavored to persuade the Bulgarians to despatch an expeditionary force to Mesopotamia. But the Bulgarians very wisely refused. They declined to fight away from their own country, and, probably with a very fair appreciation of their allies, decided to keep their troops within easy reach.

"General Sarrail's position in the Balkans is full of perilous possibilities. His line of communication is through the sea, in itself a continual source of danger.

"Germany is fighting for the future. The dramatic landing in the Gulf of Elka, the combined attack on Italy, and the successful invasion of Roumania last year, are all part of a flamboyant project to bewilder their weary people with their invincibility. Nothing is simpler than to detach an overwhelming force to ensure spectacular success.

"I do not think that Germany will fight on until she is completely crushed. She will continue until such time as defeat is beyond all doubt, or until the conquered territories she is now occupying seem to be slipping

of preparation. With losses proportionate to those of last year, the German manpower will in a year have reached a very low ebb. By next spring, the Russian armies may have recovered their morale sufficiently to take the offensive, and, with British, French and American troops hammering away on the western front, the end should not be long."

**A Third View.**  
A view less optimistic was voiced by a high British military authority, who is not in a position to talk for publication. "Until the crushing blow against Italy," this man said, "I believed that with the help of some American divisions we should be able to force the enemy to sue for peace by the end of 1918. There does not now seem much prospect of that. Whether or not we can win complete victory in the spring or autumn of 1919 depends on the shipbuilding efforts of the world and on what America can do in the field after two years' preparation. Our coming supremacy in the air will be of great importance, but it will not win the war. Of one thing you can be sure; if America feels about this war as we do in England, it will be fought out until it is won, if it takes us into the Nineteen

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