



IF NAPOLEON HAD COMMANDED THE ALLIES

THE greatest war in history, military critics agree, did not produce any outstanding military genius—but suppose it had? Suppose Napoleon had commanded the armies of the Allies? This is a speculation that has doubtless occurred to thousands of people all over the world; but one of the speculators, Walter Noble Burns, has taken the trouble to base his consideration of the possibility on a careful study of Napoleon's personality and career. "What would Napoleon have done to the Germans if he had been in command of the Allies?" asks Mr. Burns, and he answers, in a lively way, by conjuring up the shade of Napoleon to discuss the matter; or rather, it appears, as Mr. Burns loafed before dinner in a cushioned arm-chair in a comfortable room in Paris, the great leader took it upon himself to call. Mr. Burns relates his adventure in *The Yeoman Shield* (Des Moines, Iowa), beginning—

A clatter of horses' hoofs and the crunch of coach wheels sounded on the asphalt in the street. A cold draft reached me as the outer door was flung wide. Followed a sudden stir and bustle in the hall. A clear voice shouted "L'Empereur!" I had just got to my feet when, with his gray greatcoat buttoned up to his chin and falling to the golden spurs on his boots, snowflakes powdering his shoulders and sparkling on the black beaver of his three-cornered hat, in at the door strode the Emperor Napoleon looking for all the Tuileries from the Austerlitz campaign.

As I made an obeisance, he tossed his greatcoat and hat carelessly among my wife's hand-painted pillows on the divan, stood for a moment at the fireplace warming his small, shapely hands and sinking into an easy chair across the hearth, regarded me with a smile of cheerful friendliness.

As he sat with the shine of the lamp upon him, he looked so strikingly like his portraits that I inspected him curiously to see if by chance he might have carried away a part of the gilt frame as he stepped out of some old painting. I admitted to myself that I had never seen a handsomer man. His head was superb, and his marble face was of sculptural beauty. A stray wisp of chestnut hair drooped across his splendid brow as if the gentle Josephine had plastered it there with an ambrosial pomade. His gray eyes sparkled so keenly under their level brows that I half suspected he had recently indulged in a glass of his favorite Chambertin. On his breast glittered the insignia of the Iron Crown and the Cross of the Legion of Honor. The lappets of his green uniform coat and his cashmere waistcoat and knee

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trousers were of immaculate whiteness. The great Regent diamond flashed in the hilt of his sword, and his boots shone as if from the brushes of Constant, while a faint odor of eau de cologne seemed like a personal emanation.

He had such a convincing appearance of flesh and blood and vibrant life that it was difficult to believe my guest was a phantom. But the picture of the death scene a hundred years ago, of which I had read so often, rose before me in eloquent reassurance. I saw again the barren room at Longwood, the iron bed of old campaigns; the titan of world dominion, shorn of all glamor of glory, devoid of all reminders of power, reduced at last to the stark littleness of common clay; the little group of friends left alone of all the kingly throng that once hung upon his nod; the South Atlantic storm, that drove the thundering breakers high over the grim coasts of his island prison, the one imperial note in the drab pitifulness of the tragedy.

But strangely enough, says Mr. Burns, "I sat there easily with my legs crossed in the presence of the mighty spirit of St. Helena's imperial exile, not more excited or embarrassed than if my next-door neighbor had dropt in to pass the time of day." In his position of host, Mr. Burns continues:

"I'm awfully glad you came, your Majesty," I said cheerfully. "It's not only an honor but an opportunity. I have long been curious to know what you, the greatest soldier of all the ages, would have done in the World War if you had been in command of the Allied armies?"

"I should have brought to the war," answered the emperor, "what it lacked—the master mind. Great crises usually produce great men. The man, as a rule, arises to match the hour. But the most gigantic war in history failed to evolve its giant. It demanded a superman, but no superman appeared. Plodding, routine leadership was futile. What was required was the demi-divine sunflash of genius. The tools were those of titans, but there were only pigmies to handle the tools. If I had commanded the Allies, I should have won the war in two years."

"You amaze me, sire."

"The war's stupendous blunders and its stupendous, useless tragedies made me turn in my sarcophagus beneath the dome of the Invalides. I can not conceive how military men of even mediocre intelligence could have permitted the Allied Army to waste its time idly lobbing over shells during a three-years' insanity of deadlocked trench warfare."

"But, your Majesty," I hastened to interrupt, "trench warfare, when it was inaugurated after the Marne, brought a welcome lull. It gave the Allies time to develop their armies to full strength and speed up the manufacture of artillery and ammunition. It enabled England to get into the conflict on a powerful footing."

"How long," said Napoleon, "were the Allies to regard themselves as unprepared to match strength against the Germans? Three weeks or three months of trench warfare may have served a purpose, but was it necessary for it to last forever? What did it accomplish? What could it have hoped to accomplish? The fatuity of it gave the Germans a golden opportunity which all but won them the war. They had shot their bolt on the Western Front for the time being after the Marne. Russia had become menacing in the east. The trenches, combined with Allied inactivity, enabled them to hold their position in France with a minimum of men while they gave their attention to the pressing affairs on their eastern frontiers. They put Russia out of the war. They overran Serbia. They conquered Roumania. They opened up their line of communications with Constantinople. All this while the Allies sat in their trenches lobbing over shells. What a spectacle for history was this vast Army gone to sleep in its trenches while the liberty of the world was at stake and the Germans at their leisure were crystallizing their dream of world dominion! What benefit to the Allied cause were the countless instances of individual heroism, the little piffing forays across No Man's Land, the bombing, the nibbling tragedies, the killing of men by tens and fifties, the interminable lobbing over of shells? Trench warfare, forsooth! The most colossal piece of stupidity ever perpetrated by military men in the world's history."

"You forget, sire," I ventured, "that the battles of Ypres, Lens, Paschaendale, Messines Ridge were fought, and the Somme and Chemin des Dames offensives were launched in this period of what you term inactivity."

Napoleon sat for a moment pursing his lips in thought.

"Why were these battles fought?" he observed at length. "What good did they do? They gained a little ground here, took a town there, destroyed a segment of trenches yonder at a time when every blow struck by the Allies should have been a blow to gain a decision and end the war. These murderous engagements were actuated by no great purpose and had no ultimate objective. As examples of heroic fighting they were superb. But there was no reason for them. Perhaps the flowers of Flanders field bloom to-day fairer for the enrichment of so much blood uselessly shed. But they accomplished nothing. If I had been in command, they never would have been fought.

"Let me tell you," the Emperor went on, "that the Marne, which has taken its place rightfully as one of the decisive battles of the world, was decisive only negatively. It saved France and the Allies' cause when, if properly followed up, it would have driven the Germans back to the Rhine. After that great victory, I would have flanked Von Kluck out of France. Joffre attempted this, but his strategy was sophistical. His race to turn the German right resulted only in a gradual extension of the lines of both armies until they fetched up against the North Sea. How simply this problem could have been solved! I would have halted the race, concentrated and struck a smashing blow in force through the thin German line. This would have been easily feasible. Once in their rear, I would have compelled the Germans to withdraw upon their frontier bases. As it was, the victory at the Marne merely inaugurated the tragic folly of trench warfare."

"Perhaps," Mr. Burns reminded the Emperor, "you have estimated too lightly the marvelous changes that have taken place in military science. You had neither railways nor telegraph, high explosives, 42-centimeter cannon, machine-guns, airplanes, tanks, poison gas, to say nothing of the telegraph, the telephone, wireless, railroads and automobiles which have revolutionized warfare. Surprise was eliminated from this war. Airplanes made that impossible."

However—

Napoleon stepped over to me and playfully pinched my ear.

"Forget it," he said, and I need not say that the colloquialism falling from the lips of the mighty emperor whose lightest word once made Europe tremble, shocked me inexpressibly. "Forget it. If the Allies failed to create the element of surprise—that is one thing. That it was perfectly practicable was proved a number of times, notably by Ludendorff in his great drives in the last year of the war.

"Modern inventions," he resumed, "have given war a new phase, but have left its basic principle unchanged. A man who is a great soldier in his own age would be equally as great in any age. Genius works with the tools at hand and rises superior to conditions. There were many generals in my time who knew as much as I about theoretic and academic war. I learned my lessons in the same school. I fought with the same weapons and under the same conditions. But I was victor over them in fifty pitched battles. Why? Because I solved old problems in a new way. Singleness of purpose, rapidity, precision and concentration were the fundamentals of my science. More men at the right spot at the right time sums up my strategy. The celerity of my movements bewildered my enemies. I depended as much on the legs of my soldiers as on their muskets. I might lose battles, but I never lost minutes. Victory sometimes hangs upon a second.

"The surprise and precision of my blows led my foes to think I was a wizard possesser of some new magic, but mathematics was my only necromancy. Time and again by a concentration of cannon I blasted my way through the center of an opposing army. When I had destroyed the enemy's equilibrium, the rest was nothing. Once I had sliced an Army in two, I devoured it piecemeal.

"Military scientists have delved into my battles and campaigns to search out the secret of my success. They have expatiated on my 'interior lines,' my cavalry screens, my general advance guard of all arms followed by my main Army as a battalion carrée, my opportunism in battle, my clear and all-embracing vision, my ability to divine the intentions of my foes, my battle psychology."

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which enabled me to recognize the supreme moment and deliver the stroke that spelled victory. Very well. But the enigma still remains. I conquered where others using the same tactics would have failed. My secret lay in my genius. My strategy and tactics were myself, and there has lived on earth since time began but one Napoleon. For all its new weapons and new conditions, I would have solved the problems of this world war as I solved the problems of my own time. And," he added impressively, "on the theory that the primal principles of war remain unchanged through the changing centuries, I would have solved them in much the same way."

"If you had been in command of the Allied Armies," I asked, "pray, how, your Majesty, would you have won the war in two years?"

"I would have brought the war to a crisis in the fall of 1916," he answered. "The Russians were active. Roumania had come in on the side of the Allies. The Germans were fully occupied on their eastern front. They had stripped their lines in France and left them at the nadir of weakness. England had a powerful Army in the field. The Army of France was at the zenith of its strength and efficiency. The supplies of artillery and ammunition were at last adequate. The Hindenburg line had not been built. There was no longer any possible reason for delay. In men and equipment the Allies were ready for their supreme effort.

"I would have built success on my old formula of rapidity, precision and concentration. I would have concentrated heavy masses of troops back of the lines, somewhere perhaps in the neighborhood of Cambrai. This would have been a logical strategic point for attack. Victory would have placed me in a position to cut the railways leading into Germany and block the German retreat. I would have brought together vast numbers of heavy cannon. I would have distributed an immense number of machine-guns through my infantry. I would have created strong mounted machine-gun batteries. I would have had a strong force of cavalry in reserve. I always had great faith in the effectiveness of cavalry as a complement to infantry and artillery. Tho scarcely used in this war, I am confident it could have been employed to wonderful advantage. This tremendous preparation, I maintain, could have been carried through with absolute secrecy, despite the airplanes. Ludendorff proved that beyond argument.

"I would have struck the entrenched German lines on a front of not more than fifteen miles—perhaps ten. A sharp, quick, powerful blow on such a narrow front, I am convinced, would have insured a break through.

"My opening artillery attack would have been a short, intense storm of shell-

fire that could have been depended upon to level the enemy's trenches, barbed-wire entanglements and machine-gun nests. The way thus made clear, I would have hurled forward my infantry and machine-guns in supporting waves and in such masses that their impact must have proved irresistible.

"Having broken through the German lines, I would have sent my cavalry and mounted machine-gun batteries through the gap into the open country beyond to be used in pursuit and in cutting railways and communications and would have poured masses of infantry and machine-gun batteries through to the German rear and started a great turning movement.

"With the German Army divided and heavy bodies of Allied troops operating in its rear, I would have ordered a general attack along the entire Western Front. Taken on front, flank and rear, the Germans must have attempted a hasty withdrawal from France and Belgium. This retreat I would have been in a position to intercept. Vast numbers must have surrendered. If my calculations proved correct, only fragmentary portions of the German Army would have escaped across the Rhine. If I failed to end the conflict by one gigantic stroke, I would have carried the war into Germany, given the Germans a taste of their own medicine and brought the end of the war in sight."

As he unfolded his great plan, Napoleon rose from his chair, and paced back and forth across the room. He talked with an energy that made each word a bursting shell, while he punctuated his discourse with dynamic gestures and his eyes snapt fire. Mr. Burns objected, however, that to do all this Napoleon would have had to strip his lines of defense. Napoleon admitted it:

"Certainly," he exclaimed. "No great general ever lived who was not a great gambler. I would have risked much, but not all. The Allied cause would not have been lost if I had failed. I would still have had strength in reserve for a new trial. The lack of daring and take-a-chance spirit on the part of the Allied commanders was one of the causes of the war's long-drawn-out tragedy."

"But if such a victory had been possible, do you not think the Allied leaders would have attempted it?"

"No. They were too cautious. They were obsessed by a Fabian policy of delay. They waited for their armies to grow stronger. They waited for the Germans to weaken under constant pressure. They waited for the Americans to come. They waited for the day when the accumulated power of their inexhaustible resources could crush exhausted Germany. They followed throughout the war the anti-

quoted tactics of an obsolete school, scattering their efforts over wide areas, trying only for isolated successes, pitting their forces in frontal attacks against forces of equal strength, and usually fighting to a drawn decision. These were the tactics of the old school militarists of my day whom I made ridiculous by the rapidity of my movements and the deadliness of concentrated smashes against vulnerable points. To-day, as yesterday, the Lord fights on the side of the heaviest battalions."

"Yet, if you will pardon me, your Majesty, your plan for winning the war is almost identical with that which Ludendorff tried in 1918 and which met disastrous failure."

"Ludendorff struck on too wide a front in his first drive. If he had struck on a front of fifteen miles instead of fifty, he would have broken through. I think there is no doubt about that. As it was, he merely bent back the British line in a titanic bow, thirty-five miles deep, almost to Amiens. The area over which he was forced to spread was too immense; his efforts lost concentration and became diffused; opposition became more formidable the farther he plunged; his movement lost its momentum. As the bow deepened without breaking, the distance he had to traverse became so great that he outran his artillery and supplies.

"But," said Napoleon, "I give Ludendorff credit for the one stroke of genius of the war. He had the right idea and attempted its execution by methods only slightly wrong and at a period when the chances for success were least. The Allies had grown too strong; the Germans were too weak to withstand the losses his terrific drives entailed. But he ended the lunacy of trench warfare."

"But if the Allies had attempted it earlier, might they not likewise have lost?"

"Not if they had timed their effort with their opportunity. When the Allied armies in France had a preponderance of manpower and equipment and the Germans were occupied in Russia and Roumania and their western lines were weakest, then the hour for supreme Allied victory had struck. That was two years before the end came with the great German debacle. But," added Napoleon as he took a delicate pinch of snuff, "there was no man for the hour."

"I have one last question to ask you, your Majesty," I said. "It has challenged the nations since the fighting ceased as a red rag challenges a bull. Who won the war?"

"I will answer that with pleasure," returned the great captain. "It is a question that in my mind admits of no argument. I have no hesitation in saying that unquestionably the war was won by—"

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"What's the matter, my dear. Dinner's getting cold. I've called you three times and you haven't heard. Are you deaf?"

My charming wife stood in the doorway. I rose in my courtliest manner.

"Your Majesty," I said with a profound bow, "may I not have the honor to present—"

My wife laughed merrily. Across the hearth where the ghost of Napoleon had sat was only an empty chair.

