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GERMAN GENERALSHIP FAILS IN EVERY TEST AND THAT MEANS RUIN

Host of Crises, Little and Big, Have Shown That French Genius Is More Than a Match for German Power and System—Tomorrow Is Fourth Anniversary of Marne.

By Frank H. Simonds
Author of "The Great War," "They Shall Not Pass."
(Copyright, 1918, Tribune Association, New York Tribune.)

Four years ago tomorrow, September 8, 1914, the first battle of the Marne had reached its crisis. Already Maunoury's thrust eastward from Paris had been checked and turned back on the edge of the Ourcq. Foch's gallant effort from the Plateau of Sazanne to that of Evry above La Fere Champenoise was becoming a despairing defensive for all but Foch himself, who was already meditating the final thrust which next day was to decide the issue of the battle—and in the very largest sense the issue of the war. On September 8, with victory almost in sight, Germany stood on the eve of a fatal defeat.

And now, after four years, it is possible to appraise that supreme revelation of France at something like its real value. The Marne was and remains the great battle of the war. From the consequences of the defeat Germany has never been able to recover. She has tried at Verdun, in her great offensive of this year, by her unlimited and ruthless submarine warfare to escape from the decision of the Marne, but she has failed, and the consequences of her failure are written now on the western battlefield where the German tide is receding at last in an unmistakable ebb which, thanks to the presence of American divisions, can have no later flood.

In a sense the first battle of the Marne was indecisive. It was a battle of arrest which halted the German hordes as Attilla's masses had been checked at Chalons and the Saracen hordes at Poitiers. The army which was beaten was thrown back, not destroyed—there was no absolute destruction such as Napoleon suffered at Waterloo, or Prussia at Jena. It was not within the power of France with smaller population and infinitely lesser preparation to turn the successes into the national collapse into which Napoleon transformed Jena. Then and thereafter it was clear that Germany could not, but could not store crush the German millions.

All unprepared. Had Russia been efficient, Britain ready, the war would have ended in the year following the Marne. Just as it would have ended this year had we been prepared to step into the place of Russia and carry on with Britain and with France. But Russia was not efficient; Britain, like America later, needed a relatively long time to prepare. And in this time Russia was crushed and France had to stand a new avalanche of Verdun.

Yet, looking backward, we see that the Marne established the superiority of French military genius over Germany. The whole German plan of campaign was wrecked by Joffre at the Marne in 1914, by Foch at Verdun in 1916, by Foch at the second Marne in the present summer. These have been the three great crises of the western front and thus of the war. Each time victory for Germany would have won the complete phrase of the war. But each time French military genius has risen to the highest level and the result has been German defeat. But in each case the exploitation of victory has waited upon the coming to France of sufficient numbers to supply the weight France could not furnish. Three times, however, the issue of the world has hung upon the issue of a clash between French and German military genius, and in each case the German has lost. Here is a final answer to the claim still advanced of the invincibility and the superior ability of German high command.

On the military side, knowing as we know now that the war of positions was bound inevitably to come, it is impossible to escape a sense of retrospective horror at what might have been the consequences had the Germans grasped realities instead of clinging to the futile notion that a decision France was bound to succumb to German might. If the amazing cycle of preliminary victories had not gone to their heads as the wine of Champagne went to the brains of many of their soldiers, who still drunk, were captured by Foch's soldiers in La Fere Champenoise.

Defeat Within an Eyeblink. In the first days of September Calais and Boulogne were open to the smallest German attack. German garrisons occupied Amiens and Chalons, cutting the main line of French communications with their British ally, and practically isolating the French eastern fortresses from Paris. Verdun was almost surrounded and doomed to fall like a ripe fruit into the German hands. Mauberge was on the point of surrender, and a surrender would have opened the only essential line of communication between Germany and Northern France.

Had Moltke, had the German general staff but contented itself with a moment's pause, with a brief withdrawal over a few miles to defensive positions at the Marne, it would have been possible, simple, to have straightened the line across France to the channel. Calais and Boulogne would have fallen, undisturbed. The line of the Somme would have been occupied, and thus a straight and short front from the sea to the Argonne, behind the Marne, Germany would have held France to ransom; could have proceeded to the capture of the eastern fortresses and the reduction of France as one cuts an apple.

All these immense and patent possibilities were surrendered to the grandiose dream of the superman, to the intoxication of the first successes. The German failed to see realities; he saw only the swift end of the final destruction of the French armies, which in his vision had already succumbed where they had only retreated. "Six weeks at Paris" has been the timetable of the high command, and since it was there must be a realization of the timetable, literally.

Fatal Pig-Headedness. This mistake of the first Marne was repeated at the second, was illustrated at Verdun. Three times the German convinced himself that he was irresistible, and three times, acting on a conviction, he met defeat. But if he had decided upon a temporary halt on the first days of September, when his armies had reached the Marne, if he had then "dug in," as he dug in a few days later, after the Marne and behind the Aisne, his hold upon France would have been such that it is beyond question that France would have been incapable of that mighty reorganization which made it possible for the French army to continue its resistance over four more years.

The proof of this is on the map. Had the Germans never been able to advance beyond the Marne they would still have necessarily taken the eastern fortresses, already almost developed. They would have taken the last of French iron fields in Lorraine, Nancy and its surrounding industrial regions would have passed like the coal regions of the north to German hands. Seated at the edge of the channel, too, the Germans would have been able, without the loss of a man, to do those things for the chance to do which they sacrificed masses of men a few weeks later in the final act of the Marne campaign, which was the battle of Ypres.

And to this very day the German explanation of the Marne remains unmade. For three years, indeed, the Germans denied that there had been a battle of the Marne. Their official statements went dumb in the very first days of September, when the fight was beginning. The battle itself, the "battle for Paris," was covered by the reports of Hindenburg's triumph at Tannenberg. Only after the retreat to the Aisne was over did the official utterances begin again to take up the fortunes of the army which had reached the very environs of Paris. And this return to the western campaign for a brief hour was only because for that space of time the Germans were convinced, the general staff was convinced, that they had repaired their mistakes and were now about to resume their offensive, which had been interrupted at the Marne.

But it was too late. Joffre had already begun that turning movement on fields which in recent days have seen another mighty struggle and a new vic-



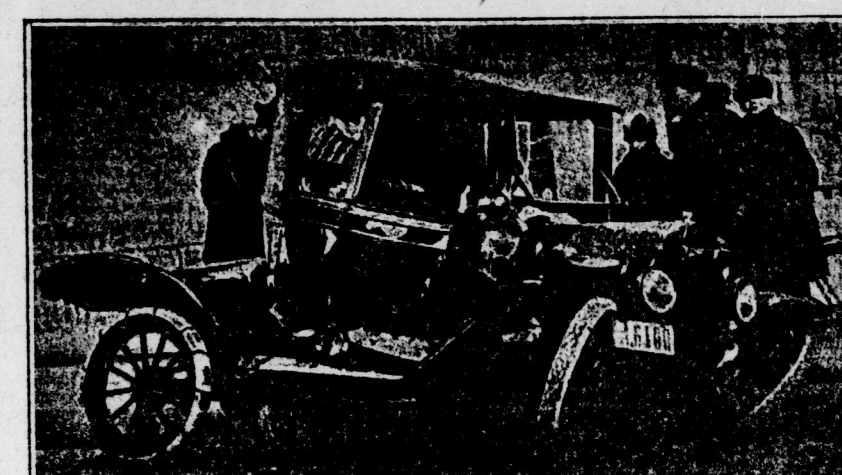
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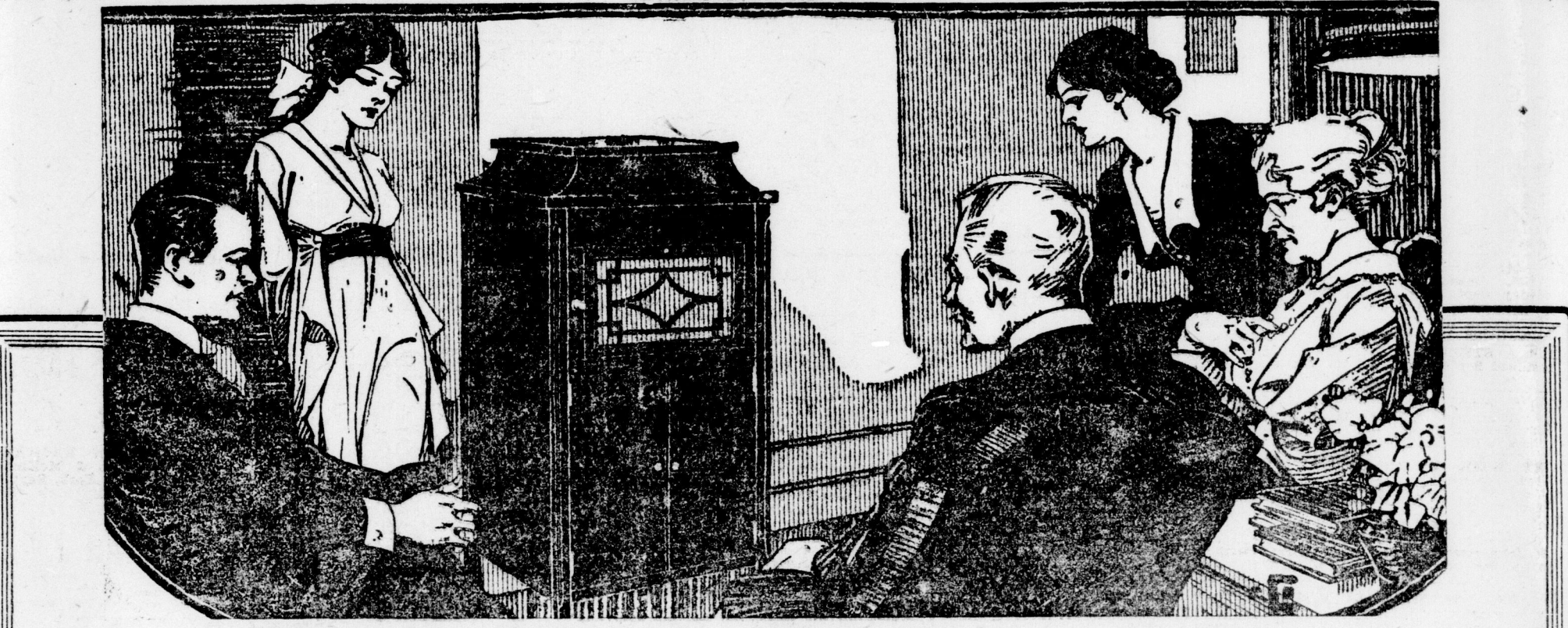
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