

The British War Machine

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The Germans were wont to call the English "a nation of traders." In so far as this epithet implied lack of military capabilities it was utterly false. Whether or not one believes that war is ever justifiable, whether one is pro-English or pro-German in this particular war, one cannot help marveling at the way the British Empire, which six months ago had one of the smallest armies in Europe, has suddenly become a great military power. The Germans had the most highly developed war machine in the world; all they had to do was to turn on the power and operate the mechanism. The British had to build their machines. They had very little to start with.

Great Britain had promised her friends in case of war to land on the Continent an expeditionary force of 125,000 men. Exact figures are as yet unobtainable, but it is probable that the British had considerably less than 100,000, possibly less than 75,000, men in the opening battles. Their force was below their number, for they were ill equipped—notably weak in artillery.

At Mons they encountered at least three times their number of the best-equipped army in Europe. It is not to their discredit that they were beaten—as they certainly were. But it is a phenomenon without precedent in military history that they were able to take this appalling beating without demoralization.

Fighting the Retreat

Their commissary—as was to be expected in a headlong retreat—went to pieces. "It was not pleasant," an officer who was in it told me, "to run away on an empty stomach." The men who were there make no bones about telling how they ran. But, as they are English, it is harder to get them talking about the interludes in their retreat when they stood and fought. They never stopped long. If three to one was not enough to start them running again, the Germans brought up ten to one. After much cross-questioning as to how they found the will to stop so often and accept more punishment, how they avoided utter rout, this officer said: "Well, you see, we began with the idea that one of us was good for four Germans. It did not seem the thing to run away from less."

"You've more respect for them now?" "Yes," he laughed. "We had to revise our estimate a bit. It isn't just the number of men, you know; it's the equipment, too. I don't think our Tommies would feel right running away from two Germans now—not unless they had a big superiority in artillery."

Field Marshal Sir John French, in describing the Battle of Marne, said that the Germans seemed to think that they could ignore the British contingent. According to all military text-books, they had a right to think so. Theoretically an army so thoroughly beaten ought to need several months of reorganization before it entered the fighting again. But when the new French army fell on von Kluck's flank along the Ourcq, all that was left of the British expeditionary force jumped into the combat as if nothing had happened to it. The German General Staff can hardly be blamed for surprise at its reappearance.

But Sir John French's force, despite its unprecedented pluck, was a very small element in the first month of the war. The German drive toward Paris was stopped by the French—and the Russians. The expeditionary force numbered perhaps one-twentieth of the soldiers of the Allies. It had covered itself with glory, but if the British Empire was to be a noticeable factor in the war on land, it was necessary to create a new army.

Plenty of Volunteers

"Recruiting" was probably the phase of the task which worried the British War Office least. The "nation of traders" has made up its mind to win. One hears little talk now in England about the causes of the war, little discussion as to who is to blame for it. War exists, and victory has been decided upon. In Lord Kitchener they have a man whom they

THREE QUARTERS OF A MILLION MEN IN THE FIELD

Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George, speaking in the House of Commons on April 21, stated that 750,000 British soldiers fully equipped were at that time in France and Belgium. In the battle of Neuve Chappelle alone more ammunition was used than in the whole of the South African war, which lasted three years, and the output of the ammunition factories of Great Britain had been increased nineteen fold since the commencement of the war.

trust. There will be very little opposition to anything he says is necessary. If he wants more men he can have universal conscription to-morrow. But he needs an army, not a mob, and that means equipment and training more than numbers.

Too many men volunteered at first. There was no organization to handle them, there were no uniforms, no guns, no barracks, no officers at hand to train them. Equipment was the pressing need,

new ones, from the foundations to the roof.

The British Army Shoe

One of the greatest feats in this matter of equipment has been the manufacture of shoes. It was not hard to find shoe factories—England is full of them; but it was necessary to find the machinery and raw material for the good quality, heavy army shoe. In times of peace such a shoe is too cumbersome for the rich and



Some of the new big guns being constructed for the British army

and for that it was necessary to mobilize British industry and commerce. How many shops were there in England that could supply rifle ammunition? Certainly there were not enough. It was necessary to know how many iron works were equipped to make the needed machinery. An industrial census was necessary—not only of England, but of all the world where the English can buy. The "right of eminent domain" was strained to the limit. It did not matter whether or not a manufacturer wanted to work for the army. If he possessed the necessary machines he had to. I visited one large iron works which before the war had a world-wide reputation for mining machinery. They have cancelled all their

too good for the poor. It was necessary to create a new industry. And the English have not only made the shoes for their own army, but have furnished at least as many to France.

It would be easy to pile example on example. Britain went into the war very short of artillery and heavy ammunition. She has made good her own shortage—the new army will have better field artillery than the Germans—and she has also saved the situation for her allies. One artillery officer has estimated that during the Battle of the Marne the French were firing 80,000 of their "75" shells a day. Their factories could not turn out much more than half as many. The factories of England have now



The carpenter shop at Woolwich Arsenal, where cases are made for ammunition

private contracts. All of their plant which is suitable for making the things the army needs is at work. The useless machinery—thousands of dollars' worth—has been scrapped to make room for new lathes, furnished by the War Office, which will turn out shrapnel shells. And every machine—new and old—is working twenty-four hours a day. And where factories which could be turned to military use did not exist the War Office has built

placed the Allies beyond any danger of ammunition bankruptcy.

Equipment is so much more serious a problem than recruiting that the British War Office is more worried over finding skilled artisans for the army factories than over the number of volunteers.

At first the War Office was hampered by an old tradition of "concentrating" their orders. It is cheaper—saves some of the taxpayers' money—to buy things

in bulk from one concern than to scatter your orders thru a dozen factories. But for a nation which may at any time have to increase its purchases immensely and suddenly this penny-wise policy is pound-foolish. One small example of this point was furnished by the case of the wooden boxes for shipping rifle cartridges. There was only one factory in England equipped for turning them out. The money which had been saved in the past by this concentration was very little compared to the cost of suddenly creating enough factories to meet the very urgent demand.

But determination to win has overcome these problems, and now—after six months—every British soldier who lands on the Continent will be fully equipped. The day when the Germans had an unquestioned superiority in all mechanical contrivances is past.

Few Graft Scandals

There have been surprisingly few graft scandals in connection with this work of equipment. There are of course people in England—as everywhere—who would be glad to reap huge profits out of their country's distress. The scandal one hears of most often was the building of emergency barracks to house the first wave of recruits. The contracts were let carelessly. The shacks which were too flimsy for use and had to be rebuilt cost the government more than good ones should have cost. But this was in the early days before things were running smoothly. Kitchener has little respect for the "rights" of the army furnishers. When a ring of woollen merchants tried to hold him up on an order for blankets, he appealed to the nation to give their extra blankets to the army. The corner in blankets fell with a crash. On the whole, those who hoped to make fortunes out of "furnishing" the army are a discontented lot—never in history have they had such poor pickings.

One thing which has greatly lessened their profits has been American competition. The price of saddles, to take one instance, is regulated in the United States, to the great chagrin of the more greedy among the English saddle-makers. But the greatest blow to the hopes of those who expected to cheat the army has been given by the trade unions. The organized labor of England refuses to be a party to such unpatriotic profits. The manufacturer who tries to fill War Office orders with rotten leather or shoddy cloth finds a strike on his hands. Judged by what happened in the Boer War, the trade unions have saved the Exchequer several million pounds. They have protected the soldiers at the front from the most cruel treachery.

The Officers

Next to equipping the new army the most important problem was how to train it. A shortage of officers cannot be overcome easily. The mortality among the officers of the expeditionary force was appalling. But in the training of the recruits this loss is not so serious as it at first appears. It is only the young, inexperienced officer who exposes himself recklessly. The casualty list shows that it is the lieutenants who get themselves killed. In the organization of the British army the subalterns are of little use in training recruits; they are very poorly educated in comparison to the officers of other countries, and little more is expected of them than to give an example of coolness under fire. A keen young man can learn most that they need to know in a few weeks. It is their function to transmit to the ranks the orders they get from above. The English army depends on its generals and non-commissioned officers. In whipping new men into shape the drill sergeant is the important person. It is here that experience counts for most. And, owing to their organization and liberal pensions to retired petty officers, the British army has an unusually large list of "reserve non-coms." Some of them are too old for service at the front, but they are ideal drill-masters. In most of the veteran

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