

# THE ARMY OF FRANCE

BARTON BLAKE

*One cause in particular has raised France to this pitch: the Revolution has awakened all powers and given each power a suitable field of activity. What infinite possibilities sleep in the womb of the nation!—Field-Marshal Count von Gnesenau of Prussia.*

“OF all great modern nations, France has been most deeply imbued with love of military glory.”

The man who wrote that sentence 15 years ago as part of a message to America, went farther in his teachings at home; he contended that all forms of patriotism were a delusion for the worker, who would be as well off under one “capitalistic” government as another. These teachings, violently phrased, cost the teacher over ten years’ freedom, and purchased for him an equal period of residence in the prisons of France.

That teacher’s name is Gustave Hervé, and sometime after we find him setting up a weekly newspaper and naming it *La Guerre Sociale*. He was editing this fiery organ of international socialism when the war came to France in 1914. And what was the war’s reaction upon this untamable revolutionary? Why, he changed the name of his paper *The Social War* to *The Victory!* and made it a daily—so that his subscribers might read his flamingly patriotic editorials seven times a week, yet Citizen Hervé remained an anti-militarist in spite of this apparent about-face. As he protested to me one day last fall, sitting in his modest apartment in the rue de Vaugirard: “I am as much a foe of militarism as ever—even more so, since we Frenchmen now have better reasons to hate organized brute force. Don’t mistake me, however. Anti-militarism doesn’t mean mental and moral mushiness; ‘non-resistance’ and ‘peace-at-any-price’ aren’t synonyms for anti-militarism. No ideal is very real or very dear that you are not willing to fight for, if need be. We French anti-militarists have not in the past chosen our part because it is a soft way of shirking disagreeable duties, but because we have certain unshakable convictions; we are willing to suffer, and even to fight, for our ideal. Today the only sen-

sible way of being anti-militarist is to shoulder a gun and help smash the Prussians. That must be our beginning if we are ever to bring to pass the International Union—the United States of the World.”

“ DAS VOLK IM WAFFEN ”

Not always has such an ideal animated the Army of France. Yet Nationalism must necessarily precede internationalism (if there is ever to be such a thing) and France it was that first of all modern European States developed nationalism and an approximately national army. Though Mirabeau, a century before Treitschke and his school crossed the t of tyranny and dotted the i's of militarism, rightly characterized Prussia as the country whose “ chief industry was war,” it is in one sense true, quite as Field-Marshal Baron Von der Goltz wrote, that “ the French Revolution marks the commencement of the present era of the conduct of war”; that the Revolution which freed France from feudalism also taught Europe the possibilities of a truly national army. For the army of the First French Republic, the army which repelled the charge of all Europe against the French frontiers, was, like no earlier army in history, a “ nation in arms.”

It was only because the entire nation rose in self-defence that the emergent democracy of France could meet the attack of all her enemies, and the power developed by free France came to be, under Prussian adaptation, the instrument of universal impoverishment, reaction, cruelty, oppression, and hate.

Not the Revolution alone was Prussia's Instructor. There was also Bonaparte, heir of that Revolution, one part of whose political philosophy was summed up in his own sayings: “ Revolution is the soldier's heyday ” and “ Democracy raises up Sovereignty; Aristocracy alone preserves it.”

“ Napoleon,” wrote Von der Goltz in our own time, “ standing at the commencement of a new period, taught what war in its unfettered form could accomplish. Upon his

principles our modern ideas are still mainly based. He recalled to the world's mind the previous instruction of Prussia's great king, Frederick." Therefore we mark in Napoleon the *funeste* fusion of Parvenu and Reactionary. And France, of course, was his primary victim.

Napoleon, the Revolution's heir, was still more truly the Revolutionary Army's highest professional product; and that army was, in part, an heritage of the age when France had a ruling class—a class descended from its ancient feudal lords, whose natural career was that of arms and whose right was dominion.

Before the 14th Century, the King of France could call to arms none but his own immediate vassals. The medieval system of *francs archers* drawn from the villages in wartime may be said to have been the earliest form of French militia, but after Louis XI we hear no more from the *francs archers*. On the other hand, we see each parish furnishing Louis XIV with its militiaman—chosen, at first, by a local vote; later, by lot from among all the countrymen subject to the draft—that is, from all the bachelors and childless widowers. In the 18th Century, the militia made up an organized reserve for the active army. Under war conditions, the "provincial regiments" of militia were incorporated in various regiments of the first line, repairing their wastage. And note that this militia was drawn from village and countryside—not from the towns and cities that were in a better position to oppose the draft.

#### OUR ALLIES OF '78

Americans are naturally interested in the reforms of the French military organization by the Comte de Saint-Germain, War Minister of Louis XVI from 1775-1777, for he adapted more than one Prussian idea (some of his officers and men protesting loudly against "barbarous punishments, taken from the codes of foreign nations") and it was he who invited Baron Von Steuben from Berlin to Paris and later sent him to America to help George Washington lick his

ragged troops into some sort of shape. If, however, Edmund Burke was right in asserting that by 1775 France had fallen, "with regard to effective military power," from first to fifth place, in spite of possessing an army of certainly not less than 160,000 officers and men, it was high time to take radical measures with the French army, too. On the eve of the Revolution, service was a matter of four years, with the option of reenlistment for the same, or a double, period. Service in the militia was set at six years. In the regular army the French private soldier was by this time paid six cents a day—a handsome rate if we consider the greater purchasing power of money in those days, and then compare that six cents with the present scale of pay in European armies! But if they were thus regally paid, privates could seldom rise from the ranks. Ten years before the Great Revolution it was decreed that no one should hold a captaincy whose family had not been noble for at least four generations.

And yet two facts stand out in regard to the French army at the moments of our, and their own, Revolutions: during our Revolution French discipline must have been much improved, since one of the officers sent to America to guarantee American freedom boasted that he could bivouac his men in a Yankee orchard and they would not so much as rob the trees, and these same officers and men, returning to France, contributed to the growing sentiment for the reform and liberalisation of French institutions.

#### WHAT THE REVOLUTION DID WITH THE ARMY

The Great Revolution brought its changes in the army, too.

First of all, the Constituent Assembly raised the pay in the regular establishment, and opened up to the rank and file the prospect of commissions—a prospect broadened, as the Revolution progressed, by field service, and by the fact that not a few of the old officers proved more faithful to their king and class than to the revolutionized nation. The *Constituante* also withdrew from the King his power to name officers other than the Commander-in-chief and the Marshals. Then

came the abolition of the militia—though the Convention ultimately called upon the Communes to furnish men. The standing army was retained practically intact: an army made up, theoretically at least, of volunteers. The nomination of subalterns by officers of their own rank, or by the privates, was now tolerated. The principles of universal military service was frankly declared in the law governing the National Guard—that popular innovation which, for a time, Lafayette himself, full of enthusiasm for liberty, commanded. In the National Guard most of the officers were elected. The Guard's chief duty was the "maintenance of public order," but detachments of it might be, and were, called out against an invader. The National Guard, in its reincarnations, did not pass out of existence till 1871. *The essential point in its history is the acceptance of the principle that every citizen owes the State service as called for; and the insistence upon this principle on the part of a people which, passing through violent revolution, nevertheless avoided that sophistry dear to modern egoists and "radicals," the denial that there can be any such thing as an unpleasant duty. The reality of the French Revolution consists, in great measure, in these simple facts—so often skipped by picturesque historians.*

"AND FRANCE IS SAVED!"

The Revolution even more effectively established compulsory and universal service by a Law of the Directory—the law of the 6th Fructidor of the year VI. Frenchmen from 20 to 25 years of age (termed *defenseurs conscrits*) were divided into five classes. These young men were liable to four years' active service. No class was to be called till the reservoir of younger men, beginning at 20, had been emptied.

"We have never accepted the Terror," writes Edouard Herriot, long-time Mayor of Lyons, also Senator from the Rhône, and an ex-Minister of State; "but let us recall the frightful situation of France in 1793: the Spanish entrenched in our department of the Eastern Pyrenees; the English holding Toulon and laying siege to Dunkirk; the Austrians mas-

ters of the Condé and of Valenciennes; the Prussians pushing our troops back in Alsace. 'The Republic is no more than a great city beleaguered,' declared a member of the Convention. Yet at the same time it saved the country, the Convention gave France the modern organization by which, ever since, it has lived."

In the last three years, more than one Frenchman has, like M. Herriot, echoed Danton. Remember that in September, 1792, France was trembling for Verdun, even as one hundred and twenty-four years later. When Danton (Minister of Justice) mounted the tribune, "It is indeed a satisfaction," he began, "for the Ministers of a free people to announce to the people's representatives that their country will be saved. From one end of the country to the other, everyone in France is moved; everyone thrills; everyone burns for the combat. You know that Verdun is not yet in your enemy's power. You know that the garrison has sworn to die rather than surrender. The tocsin which it sounds will be heard throughout all France. Its ringing is not a signal of alarm—it is a charge against the enemies of our Motherland. To conquer, gentlemen, we must have audacity, more audacity, audacity forever—and France is saved!"

The victories of Napoleon may be more brilliant—his achievements were at any rate less noble—than those of the First Republic, which formed his first battalions. Napoleon cost his countrymen the lives of a million of their sons. Yet the sullen stupidity of his enemies (and France's), in their refusal to accept the Revolution, in their stubborn and wrong-headed restoration of the Bourbon Kings who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing (as if the clock of all France could be set back *and kept back!*) made Napoleon seem, not tyrant, but child and symbol of nationalism and of the Revolution—the victim of an alien tyranny. Set on his Rodin-esque pedestal of St. Helena, Napoleon became "a martyr and a hero, almost a god." And in glancing briefly at the French Army and its place in the nation we need not linger over the record of his successors—even though they waged war on Spain and laid the foundations for France's coloni-

zation of Northern Africa. Enough that the Bourbons did not live up to the spirit of the Charter of 1814 in its pledge that there should be no conscription. Under them, indeed, the term of military service was increased to six, and later to eight years, and they continued Napoleon's undemocratic system by which substitutes could be purchased.

The principle of *universal* military service (in war-time) was, moreover, definitely adopted by the pinchbeck militarists of the *Empire Libéral* (Feb. 1, 1868). This military law was by no means popular. Men still drew lots to learn whether or not they would serve in the peace-time army, and service was set at five long years. Men not drafted into the regular army were, in theory at least, mustered into the departmental *Garde Mobile*, roughly corresponding to America's State Militia; a force that played a brave but disappointing rôle in the tragedy of 1870-1871.

#### THE WAY OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

Under the Third Republic, child of that tragedy, the increased pressure of the military system weighed least heavily, perhaps, upon the young men of the middle classes. These young men were, all the same, the most sensitive to that pressure, and voiced the loudest protests against serving. The band of antimilitarist agitators, before the war of 1914, included such a man as Urbain Gohier, editor of *L'Aurore* and author of "L'Armée contre la Nation," who, like Gustave Hervé, preached unqualified resistance to the ideal and practice of military duty—whereas the leading Socialist of France, Jean Jaurès, accepted the theory, but demanded a more democratic army, modeled in part upon the Swiss system, and a shorter term of military training.

"Antimilitarism," explained M. Gohier in an article of 1906, "is the product of compulsory military service." In 1870, Gohier goes on, France suffered a crushing defeat. To prepare for revenge or to guarantee the Republic a continued national existence, it became necessary to recruit huge battalions, and to adopt the system of the "nation in arms." This was accomplished by the Law of July 25, 1872.

Henceforth, every Frenchman was reckoned a soldier from the age of 20 to 45, and had to serve in barracks for five years.

“Sons of widows, eldest brothers of large families, young men who could pass a certain examination, or produce certain diplomas, and pay £60, had only to serve *one year*”—in peace. “Thus,” writes M. Gohier, “the bourgeoisie conferred on themselves an enormous privilege.” As we have seen, however, the Empire had gone much farther, in allowing purchased exemptions—as the North did in the American Civil War. Precedent for this—not to go back to the Old Régime—was found in the practice of the Restoration and of one of the Empires. The system of purchased substitutes was the weak spot in that high-sounding saying of Napoleon: “Conscription is an admirable national institution when it becomes a point of honor for which every citizen is jealous; then is the nation great, glorious, and strong; then is it that the nation can defy reverses, invasions—and even time.” The military law of the Third Republic has at all times been more democratic, even when more onerous, than any other French Military Law since the Great Revolution.

In 1889, by the Law of July 15, compulsory service was reduced to three years, and the system of one year’s service retained for students of a certain standing—without the payment of any fees. The fee under the Law of 1872 was supposed to cover uniform, equipment, etc.—the theory being that the young man who thus served was a “volunteer,” and paid his own way. From 1889 onward the one-year clause favored only about 2000 students annually.

But perhaps the essential grievance of French socialists and Syndicalists lay in the fact that the army was used in maintaining public order in the time of great strikes. (The Socialists had pointed to Switzerland as a republic which maintained an army but was free from militarism—yet even in Switzerland the army had been used in strike-time.) More or less ironically, the ex-Socialist, Aristide Briand, was in power when a great railway strike was threatened, and met the situation by calling all railway employees to the colors,

and assigning them the duty of service on the railways of France! This broke the strike—and annoyed many Socialists.

“The Law of 1872 was a great misfortune for the army-worshippers,” wrote another antimilitarist in 1902: and gives as his reason, not the inequality of it but the fact that it *did* make military service obligatory even for the “educated and enlightened”—i. e., the youthful intellectuals. These superior young men strenuously objected to “the mechanical and stupefying exercises of the barracks, to the trained-dog parades they were obliged to undergo, to the brutalities of unbridled officers and all the foolishness and arrogance of drillmasters.” For these young men knew how to write. Once free, they howled out their grievances against the army that had “stolen” whole years from their eager young lives. From these experiences, these grievances, sprouted a great stream of antimilitary books and pamphlets. “While the comic papers caricatured the ‘Ramollot and Ronchonot’ of the barracks, while in his ‘Fifty-First Chasseurs’ Courteline turned to ridicule all the meanness and degradation of military life, Rescaves wrote with a pen dipped in gall his romance of a ‘Sous-Off,’ in which he pilloried the brutal and dishonest non-commissioned officers who, according to him, crawled through the French Army; and Darien wrote his ‘Biribi,’ painting the horrors of the military prison.” Coincidentally, or a little later, came Tolstoy’s pacifist romances and essays which attained a great vogue in France.

#### THE LOWEST EBB

At the opening of the present century two great political parties in France had turned their faces against the Army of the Republic: the Radicals and the Socialists. Already anticlerical, the Radicals were converted to antimilitarism by the Boulanger crisis and the Dreyfus affair. Said Hervé at about this time: “The Radicals began to notice the irreducible antagonism between the military spirit of passive obedience and the republican spirit. . . of free inquiry; between the régime of armed peace, which swallows up in

preparations for war a thousand millions every year, and the democratic republican régime, which demands material amelioration in the lot of the working class . . . The palmy days of the sword are numbered in France."

"But it is the Socialist party particularly which leads the assault," he added in 1902. "The Radical and Socialist parties . . . control two-fifths of the seats of the deputies and senators." For 15 years their power, that of the Socialists in particular, had been increasing. And Hervé, himself a dismissed college professor, praised the part played by the antimilitary school-teachers in moulding the Young France, and teaching suspicion and hatred of the army.

In 1905 the Republic, even more completely under the Socialist influence, legislated a further reduction in the term of military service. This was now set at two years for all alike. In August, 1913, however, in spite of bitter opposition on the part of Jean Jaurès and the internationalists, the term of service was again made three years. By 1913, even the coolest and most reluctant intelligences had pretty much given up trying to persuade themselves that Pan-Germanism and the fulminations of such a journalist as Maximilian Harden meant nothing, for every portent showed that war was only a question of months and of Germany's convenience: Germany's overwhelming war-preparations and expenditures, open as well as secret, left no doubt of that. The French Law of 1913 marked the culmination of France's effort to keep her "place in the sun" in spite of pacifist intentions at home and the fallen birth-rate which prohibited, even if French civilization did not forbid, the cult of aggression and the pursuit of military glory. France's army was organized under the law of 1913 when war came to her in 1914.

In 1911 Herr Harden, Bismarck's man, and the most notable of German journalists, was writing: "The hostile arrogance of the western powers releases us from all treaty obligations . . . and forces our Empire to revive the ancient Prussian policy of conquest . . . When we can put 5,000,000 German soldiers into the field we shall be able to dictate to France . . . France must learn once more

that, should honor or interest require it, Germany would not take twelve hours to make up her mind to war."

#### HOW FRANCE FINDS AN ARMY

Now that all America—either as participant, parent, or friend—faces the facts of a more or less general military service, let us note the means by which France has actually lived up to the principles of universal manhood service.

One may safely begin by asserting that there are no exemptions in France save for physical defects. (If there are shirkers—*embusqués* is the word in current slang—their number is beneath notice.) Every year the total of youths attaining military age—20—is determined by boards of mixed military and civilian membership which, in the fall, tour their respective districts. The sum of the lists drawn up by these boards makes up the "class" of that particular year. Service, on the part of the young men so listed, is as I have said, limited to three years. Subsequently the soldier passes (for eleven years) into the "reserve of the active army," which is subject to two training periods of four weeks each. For seven years thereafter he is a member of the "territorial army" that is called out once for a two-weeks period. Finally, he is graduated into the "reserve of the territorial army," in which he continues until he is 48 years of age. As a member of this reserve he is not called upon for service except in the emergency of war.

What was the size of the French Army when war came to France in 1914? It contained 21 corps, and the national territory was divided into as many "regions." Each of these regions (except Algiers) furnished its corps, and it has been the theory that in peace time each corps should serve in its own region, each regiment in the territory from which it was recruited. The so-called "regional" regiments, however, have not been a part of the local army corps and have generally been stationed on the eastern frontier. The territorialization of the army has reduced its cost to the nation besides lightening the service for the soldier and his family. It is an essential fact of universal military service, as understood

in France, that the soldier is carrying out an obligation to the State—that he is not a mercenary, but a citizen doing his duty. The soldier has a cent a day by way of pocket money—but there is no pretence that he is “paid”—or should be paid. War-time allowances are made to his dependents.

France’s home army consisted of about 703,000 on the first of August, 1914. Her colonial army, for work overseas, in which service is in theory voluntary, consisted of 87,000 men. These numbers were greatly increased upon the declaration of war.

The modern Army of France is as democratic an institution as the Army of the Old Régime was aristocratic, or as the Army of the Restoration and *Empire Libéral* was aristobourgeois. The social and hierarchic make-believe of the Prussians, the class distinctions of the old-time professional British and American armies, have had no place in the admirable instrument which is only one expression of the free and, in our time, peace-loving, people of France. (France has been peace-loving since she has been permitted to be democratic.) Anyone who knows either the 20th Century France of Before-the-War, or the tortured but unbroken France of today, can attest to the paternal but unpatronising affection of many a higher officer, no less than to the older-brother attitude of lesser officers for the private soldiers placed under their command, not to do homage to an officer’s vanity, but to save France for herself and for the world. One of the rules which helped to keep the army democratic, even before the war laid its heavy toll upon the corps of officers, was the rule that at least one-third of those officers must have risen from the ranks. The devoted loyalty of the private soldiers to their commanders is one of the many qualities that has made the Republic’s army irrefragable.

From the Marne, the Somme, the Ancre, and again from Verdun, has sounded the echo of Danton’s thunder—the tempestuous eloquence of devotion, of truth:

*“Audacity, more audacity, audacity forever—and France is saved!”*

# SENTIMENTALIZING OVER THE HUN

LOUISE MAUNSELL FIELD

**A**S a nation, we Americans are good-natured, and somewhat sentimental. Moreover, our sentimentality is of a peculiarly amiable kind. Not only have we a strong taste for the pretty and the pleasant, but even while vigorously doing our best to combat it, we try to convince ourselves of the concealed prettiness and pleasantness of much that is essentially ugly. And never has this especial characteristic of ours been more markedly shown than during the period which has elapsed since it was acknowledged that we are at war with Germany.

After demonstrating a degree of patience nothing short of phenomenal, we were finally kicked into the great struggle. But to our amiable sentimentality war is doubly disagreeable, not because we are cowardly, or because we do not want to fight—no intelligent nation wants to fight—but because it makes us sorrowful to think that any nation on the face of the earth could possibly want to fight with us. Wherefore we promptly set up a bogey which we called the Imperial German Government, and declared that it and it alone was guilty. Our quarrel, so we proclaimed earnestly and frequently, and so only too many of us still maintain, is with this Imperial German Government and not with the German people.

Now it would be difficult if not impossible to denounce the German Government unjustly, or to accuse it of any crime of which it is not guilty, there being no crime known to history which it has not committed. But when we talk about it as though it were something entirely apart and different from the German people we make a mistake which is not only foolish but positively dangerous. For if it is a perilous thing to under-estimate one's opponent physically, it is at least equally hazardous to over-estimate him morally. And this is precisely what we are doing when we sentimentalize