

**A NATION TRAINED IN
ARMS OR A MILITIA?
LESSONS IN WAR FROM
THE PAST AND THE PRESENT**

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A nation trained in arms or a militia? Lessons in war from the past and the present by Hugo Friedrich Philipp Johann Freytag-Loringhoven

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A Nation Trained in Arms Or a Militia?

Lessons in War from the Past and the Present

By

Lieutenant-General
Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven

Author of "Deductions from the World-War"

With an Introduction by

Maj.-Gen. Sir C. E. Callwell, K.C.B.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little volume, the work of a soldier whose *Deductions from the World War* has recently attracted much attention and whose views are expressed with a moderation that is refreshing in a representative of Prussian militarism, should appeal to all in England who recognize the imperative necessity of deciding betimes upon a national defence policy that will meet the strategical requirements of the British Empire in years to come. The purpose of the author is to show that a militia organization—a military system under which the land forces of the State are composed mainly or entirely of troops who spend only short periods in the ranks in peace time—cannot be relied on to safeguard the realm in face of the jealousies, nor to withstand the at-

tacks, of neighbours and rivals. He has the subject that he is dealing with at his fingers' ends. His examples culled from history are happily chosen and are most illuminating. His account of the development of the German military machine of today, concise as it is, is likely to contain much information that will be new to most readers in the United Kingdom. His deductions from the World War are apposite, and are convincing on the whole. His arguments are well balanced, they only occasionally take the form of special pleading, and he can fairly claim that he proves his case.

At the same time, we are not bound to agree absolutely with all that he writes, nor are we compelled to accept the whole of his facts quite at their face value. It may be worth while, indeed, before proceeding further, to indicate one or two passages that appear to invite criticism. In treating of the present war, for instance, he attri-

butes German successes entirely to training, organization, and morale, and he leaves out of account, the enormous advantages that his country possessed in the early days, as a result of its having at command the vast stores of war material which had been got together in the years preceding the outbreak of hostilities in anticipation of the coming struggle. In speaking of the Russian shortcomings again, he ignores the harrowing lack of munitions from which the Tsar's forces suffered in 1915, and which was the cause of their discomfiture far more than any backwardness in the personnel. We cannot reasonably complain at the assumption on the part of a Prussian general that the French infantry in 1914 were not a match in respect to efficiency for their antagonists; but we need not admit it. In his reference to the American War of Independence the author also seems to fall into error. He is justified in contending that their espousal of the cause of the

colonists by the French decided the issue; but he puts the result down to the help afforded by the small land force which was dispatched by Louis XVI across the Atlantic. It was the intervention of Admiral De Grasse and his coadjutors that compelled this country to acquiesce in the United States separating themselves from the British Isles. "Before quitting that struggle for independence," writes Mahan, "it must again be affirmed that its successful ending, at least at so early a date, was due to control of the sea—to sea power in the hands of the French, and its improper distribution by the English authorities."¹

General von Freytag-Loringhoven disposes very effectively of the myth that the irregular levies got together by the Republican Government after the French Revolution proved themselves to be efficient troops in face of the enemy. The achievements of these tumultuary forces were

¹ *Influence of Sea Power upon History.*

grossly exaggerated at the time, and the delusion has been fostered ever since by writers who have not been fully conversant with the facts. Misconceptions regarding what the *sans-culotte* legions accomplished served to popularize the militia idea in most countries for years afterwards, and nowhere indeed did these doctrines find greater favour than in Prussia itself during the years immediately following the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The truth, however, is that such successes as these improvised legions could place to their credit were due almost entirely to the fact that the armies with which they were confronted represented the fighting forces of a coalition, and one which suffered in exceptional degree from the drawbacks inherent in coalitions. The Republican soldiery improved as the years passed, because they gained war experience in a succession of campaigns. And so it came about that when Napoleon came upon the scene, mili-

tary organizations, which in 1793 and 1794 had often partaken of many of the characteristics of an undisciplined rabble, had developed into material which a great administrator was able to transform into a mighty engine of war, and which a master of the military art was to turn to most brilliant account in the field.

The prolonged succession of struggles in which France engaged between 1792 and the year of Waterloo, affords incontrovertible evidence of the immeasurable superiority of trained over partially trained troops. That at different junctures the Vendéans, the Tyrolese under Andreas Hofer, and the Spanish guerillas of Peninsular days, gave regular troops of the highest class considerable trouble, cannot be disputed. But, as is so well shown in this little volume, those irregular warriors were never able to achieve more than ephemeral triumphs, and when they met with reverse the reverse spelt rout and disaster. The Prussian Army,