

**AT THE SUPREME
WAR COUNCIL**

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At the Supreme War Council by Peter E. Wright

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PETER E. WRIGHT

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MARSHAL FOCH

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AT THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

BY
CAPTAIN PETER E. WRIGHT

LATE ASSISTANT SECRETARY, SUPREME
WAR COUNCIL

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

THOUGH it has hardly been detected by the many and hostile critics of this book, my main object in writing it was to establish the truth on a number of points: for a number of plain truths about the war had been obscured for the public, or rather never revealed to it, at all. Many of my views, here expressed, are, and perhaps always will be, debatable: for men always have, and always will, argue for ever about battles, and no estimate of a human character can be fixed or final. But there is one fact which is unshaken and unshakable, and which was no less a shock to the public than it had been to myself when it came to my knowledge. In this war we, the Allies, were big and our enemies small during almost the whole contest. Yet they held out for four years, and nearly won.

Now, with great deference, given my humble military rank, I find a moral in this, of great import to my own fellow-countrymen, and perhaps of

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tremendous import to their kinsmen in the United States. That moral is rather commonplace, like all morals, and it is that you cannot improvise in war: like all other vast practical enterprises it needs preparation to be successful. The Anglo-Saxons have never really believed this, and remained obstinately opposed to, and contemptuous of, military life. They are likely to be confirmed in their error by their success: for now the Teutonic and Slav rivals have collapsed, they stand almost as the pre-eminent race. If they can win wars without being military, it is hardly likely they will come to think that it is necessary to be military in order to win wars.

This little book aims at telling them that, in spite of a vast preponderance in numbers as well as in all other forms of military strength, they nearly lost. Reflecting sincerely, and, I hope, without immodesty, on the great British efforts, it seems to me that the evil of improvisation, and the advantage of preparation, do not lie on the surface, and cannot be easily detected. A nation of sportsmen and business men can rapidly create all that makes a great army, men, officers, material, and enthusiasm. One thing, however, cannot be created offhand and at will, but is the fruit of long

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efforts and the work of generations—command, great leaders, and the right conceptions of strategy. The greatest problem and practice we had ever given our Regular Army in Europe was handling four skeleton divisions at autumn manoeuvres: we then required them to handle sixty real divisions on a real battle-field. It was like asking men employed to build cottages, suddenly to construct a cathedral. Hence the long duration of the war.

Paradoxical and unpalatable as this truth may be, my little book shows that the Allies ultimately won when they were weaker than their adversary, after failing to beat him for years during which they were much stronger: it also endeavours to show the simple reason, that they at last found the right method of command and the right commander, Foch. But Foch and Foch's 1918 battle is not the product of chance, any more than Michael Angelo or the Sistine frescoes are. He is the outcome of a long national effort, of a universal sacrifice to military life, of a passionate conviction that military command is one of the highest arts, of the devotion of the finest French minds to this profession, of the unspoken resolve of generations to be ready for this struggle. Only at this price can the military genius that decides the fate of