

# **THE GERMAN ARMY IN WAR**

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The German Army in War by A. Hilliard Atteridge

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**A. HILLIARD ATTERIDGE**

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ARMY IN WAR**



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BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

**I**N the following chapters I have tried to give briefly and in plain untechnical language an account of the origin of the German military system, and the organisation and war methods of the German army. I trust that the little book will prove interesting and useful to readers of the war news and to many of our young soldiers who are now training to meet that army in the field.

I have endeavoured to make the book a collection of facts, with only so much discussion of them as is necessary to make them clear to the reader, avoiding as far as possible any attempt at criticism. But the mere statement of these facts is enough to show that the German army is a very formidable fighting organisation. And I think it is well that this should be understood. It is a mistake to underrate an opponent. The Germans made this mistake with regard to our own gallant army. Some writers here at home appear to me to have been as much at fault in their estimates of the German army at the outset of the war.

In our case a mistake of this kind has very unfortunate results. In the first place it does an injustice to our own splendid fighting men. If the German army were an inefficient, out-of-date war machine, if it sent to the front a crowd of blundering leaders and half-hearted soldiers, there would be little credit due to those who have stood up so gloriously against its onset. In the

second place, unjustified depreciation of our opponents is only too likely to make men think that no great effort will be needed for their final overthrow. Such a mistaken estimate is only too likely to lead to a slackening of the effort to send abundant help to those who are bearing the brunt of the battle.

But from those very men there is evidence enough that the German army system has been quite efficient enough to produce (1) enormous masses of trained soldiers, (2) and these so inspired with the soldier spirit that they face death unflinchingly even in attacks that seem doomed to utter failure. To quote one instance out of many, the official "Eye Witness" with Sir John French's headquarters has told us how, in one of the attacks near Ypres, a column of young soldiers struggled onward amid a deadly fire from our own lines, singing as they came, renewing the attack again and again, and only desisting from a hopeless effort when the ground was heaped with their dead and wounded. Such disciplined courage wins the admiration of every true man. Such soldiers and such an army cannot be despised.

But here let me say that, while fully recognising the good points of the German system and the German army, I am not one of those whose study of German war methods has led them to prefer the foreign system of universal service to our own. On the contrary, I hold that under our voluntary system we have produced and are producing the best type of soldiers in the world, and can obtain as many of them as we need. But holding that

view I also hold that there is no reason to shut one's eyes to the merits of the German system or to undervalue the soldierly qualities of the men it has produced. So little is this the case that, to our great gain, we have, since the war of 1870, been to some extent learners from Germany in military matters. We have adopted many of the methods of the German army, but we have not been mere slavish imitators, and it may be said that we have "bettered the instruction." France, too, has been a pupil of Germany, and has adopted much more of the German system than we have taken into our own.

In dealing with the German interpretation of the law of war, I have stated what is the practice of German commanders in the field, and I hope I have made my meaning so clear that no reader will mistake my explanation for a defence, or even a palliation, of German misdeeds in Belgium. The concluding chapter on German ideas on the invasion of this country might easily have been made longer, but I have purposely kept to the one decisive point—the absolute futility of all and any project for anything more than a mere local raid, so long as our navy holds the command of the sea. That it will hold it to the end of this war, and long after this war has become a memory, I have not the shadow of a doubt. Though a writer of military history, I believe in the primary importance of Sea Power, and our navy embodies and exercises that power in the highest degree—to a degree, indeed, that has never been surpassed, perhaps never equalled, in the long annals of war.