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# Wilson: Naval and Military Strategist

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WILSON: NAVAL AND MILITARY STRATEGIST

(TITLE)

BY

Gordon E. Herron

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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Master of Arts -- History

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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## CHAPTER I

### ROAD TO WAR

When the war in Europe started, Woodrow Wilson was amazed and surprised. Actually most Americans were surprised, for the real conditions in Europe were unknown to the general public. Very few messages could be found in the different news sources sighting the real possibilities on the European scene.

As a result of Wilson's complete lack of involvement in the European situation, he was unable to react to the situation. Thus, the good offices of the United States were never really extended.

"Like most other Americans, he looked passively upon the swirl of events abroad, understanding their evil impact and yet not knowing what to do."<sup>1</sup>

With the war in motion in Europe, many Americans were afraid if America became involved in European war,

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson, The New Democracy, ed. Ray S. Baker and William E. Dodd, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926), p. 69.

the domestic minded professor would not be up to the type of leadership necessary during a war. Still others, such as the pacifists and the westerners, wondered if Wilson could deal with the problems of neutrality without over-involvement, which might lead us into war. The hawks asked, would he allow our flag to be disgraced without taking firm and positive action.

The cause for so many questions to be asked of Wilson is, of course, centered around his apparent lack of training and interest in foreign affairs. The fears were natural and real and only the President's actions would settle or unsettle the honest fears of the public.

Immediate problems presented near-panic in several areas that affected Americans and American interests. Wilson met the first problem of Wall Street by sending the competent and confident Secretary of the Treasury, William McAdoo, to Wall Street with a car load of money and assurance that the government would do whatever was necessary to save the American economic system. Next, Wilson satisfied the economic needs of Americans abroad, by allowing the embassies to counter-sign travellers checks and letters of credit. In finding

ships to bring home the frightened tourists, he found the United States lacking a merchant marine. He managed to get the Americans home, but, he ran into problems when attempting to acquire ships for the expected boom in American exports. "Only fifteen ships flew the American flag on transatlantic or transpacific routes." <sup>2</sup>

Wilson had an added burden during these summer days in 1914. At the very time war was breaking out in Europe, his beloved Ellen lay dying. "People around him were amazed at the cool dispatch in which he handled the office of President and then hurried to his wife's bedside." <sup>3</sup>

During the fight over the shipping bill in mid 1916, Wilson ran into two enemies, Elihu Root and Henry Cabot Lodge. Both were members of Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet during the imperial era. The shipping bill, if passed, would allow the United States to buy German ships

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<sup>2</sup>John Dos Passos, Mr. Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

rendered unuseable by the British blockade. Shouts of socialism followed and the bill was talked to death.

"Lodge and Root, talked it to death in one of the longest and bitterest filibusters yet recorded." <sup>4</sup> Wilson referred to those that opposed him as men with "entrenched interests." The savage attack he made shocked his supporters. Wilson could never understand how reasonable men could oppose him.

For a few months after the Neutrality Proclamation, based on international law, it appeared that the United States would benefit by the war economically. A few incidents with the British on the matter of contraband caused some slight stir in Washington. Soon the specter of the German U-boat emerged, giving reason for alarm. Wilson had already hinted at the possibility of the high seas being the most vulnerable area of America's neutrality. A climax to the German submarine warfare was reached when the British liner, Lusitania was sunk, with a loss of 128 Americans. Wilson would not move toward war even though he was pressed hard by public opinion and by politicians.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

"If he went to the congress the next day and asked for a declaration of war, he would be supported." <sup>5</sup>  
 After a series of notes between the United States and Germany over the Lusitania affair, Germany made some mild conciliations, no concessions.

The question of preparedness had been introduced by the House as early as the summer of 1913.

"Wilson was not receptive, arguing that there was no need for action, that it would shock the country, that the exhaustion of Europe would be our future safeguard." <sup>6</sup>

The House again approached Wilson in November, 1915.

Wilson was receptive in a mild way. The public attitude continued to mount in favor of actions for defense, preparedness was becoming a new issue. Wilson responded finally to the public clamor and his own persuasion that the nation's defenses were inadequate. On July 21, 1915, he asked Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels and Secretary of War, Lindley M. Garrison to prepare programs aimed at establishing reasonable security.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Walworth, Woodrow Wilson World Prophet, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Harley Nutter, The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1937), p. 65.

Wilson thought the Navy recommendations unreal and a compromise was readily agreed upon. The naval expenditure amounted to \$500,000,000 to construct ten battleships, six battle cruisers, ten cruisers, fifty destroyers, one hundred submarines and lesser vessels of various types. Garrison's proposals were along the lines acceptable to Wilson, although, Wilson disagreed with the Secretary of War about public involvement and about lack of detail involving costs. The Garrison plan, as it was known, was drawn up by the Army War College. The proposal asked for an increase of the regular, from 108,000 officers and men to 250,000. "They would remain the cornerstone of the military structure, the cadre of any future larger army."<sup>7</sup> A new reserve continental army of 400,000 men would be created as a first line of defense. The National Guard thought of as useless as a vehicle of national defense by the military would be left alone, with the primary purpose being police duties.

The President's reasonable preparedness, a term he liked to use, was made public on September 3, 1915.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Link, Struggle For Neutrality, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), Vol. IV, p. 18, 19.



Some anguished protests followed; for example, one old friend wrote, "You are sowing the seeds of militarism raising up a military and naval caste, and the future alone can tell what the further growth will be and what the eventual blossoms."<sup>8</sup> Roosevelt's reaction was just the opposite. He felt the President's preparedness program to be inadequate in scope. This was not the feeling of most progressives.

For the most part, it appeared that public opinion was with the President. "Most encouraging to Wilson were the signs that Democratic leaders in Congress seemed to approve heartily."<sup>8</sup> Wilson had taken special care that all committees and chairmen involved in defense were kept posted on all programs proposed. Only Claude Kitchin of North Carolina, the House majority leader, refused to offer his blessings.

To Wilson preparedness was a practical and political necessity. His heart and soul believed in peace, so how could he justify preparing for war. This haunted the President until he found the answer, to him at least, in the Bible, Ezekiel 33:2-6, as follows:

"2. Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman:

3. If when he seeth that sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people;
4. Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own hand.
5. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon his own head. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul.
6. But if the watchman see the sword come and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; If the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand."

Even with all the aforementioned assuredness of the success for preparedness in Congress, there developed a terrible fight for the passage. Herbert Croly, editor of the New Republic seemed to start the controversy by suggesting that "Wilson's policies were vague and full of platitudes."<sup>10</sup> There was much truth in Croly's statements,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 23.



for Wilson's true confidence and leadership on preparedness was lacking, for in reality, he still believed the nation would remain at peace.

Not only active pacifists but also progressives opposed preparedness. However, the old enemies of progressivism, such as big naval advocates, industrialists, and bankers, all lined up behind preparedness. This fact alone caused many progressives to naturally be against preparedness.

But, there were many progressives from humanitarian, socialist, labor, and farm organizations that were opposed ideologically to preparedness. "To them it meant turning America into an armed camp like Europe, glorification of force, and, worst of all, an end to reform at home." <sup>11</sup>

In addition, lobbyists supporting a powerful National guard was hard at work to cause the rejection of Garrison's continental army. Wilson who was not happy with Garrison at the time, found the Secretary of War unwilling to compromise his general plan.

A confrontation between President Wilson and Garrison early in 1916 caused our preparedness policy to be in a state of flux. Garrison finally resigned; and, to the surprise of leaders in Washington, Wilson chose Newton D. Baker, a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

former mayor of Cleveland, a known pacifist, as Garrison's successor. Garrison resigned due to his fight with Wilson over the Secretaries desire for stronger preparedness. To fit the theme of neutrality, the President chose Baker.

Wilson met the impending fight with the cool dispatch he was noted for. He met with congressmen continually selling preparedness right up to the day of his speech. He exercised total control of his self-discipline that he might not be riled into rash actions; and with all the action going on, he still found time to relax.

The fight for preparedness continued on into the spring and summer of 1916. The end result in Wilson's words was, "I think that the whole country will feel that this Congress has accomplished a very remarkable part of the program of national defense."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Wilson could take pride in the fact that his contest had been won. The long hours of conferences and his many miles of traveling throughout the country informing his beloved public, paid off in success against quite determined resistance.

The German submarine problem continued constant throughout 1916 and early 1917. The Lusitania affair was still hanging fire in February 1916. The Germans

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

would not admit the illegal sinking of the Lusitania. Finally, it appeared the Lusitania affair was over when Germany recognized some liability by suggesting a possible reparations payment to the United States. Wilson failed to establish the word "illegal" in the final formula.

During the Lusitania affair protests, the British liner Arabic was sunk. This resulted in two Americans losing their lives. Wilson was beside himself as to what to do. With the 1916 election only a few months off, Wilson wanted to establish a peace theme and to keep national pride buoyant. Without committing himself too far, the President inspired a news report: "if what the facts of the sinking of the Arabic proved to be what they seemed to be from the first accounts, the United States Government would break off diplomatic relations with Germany." <sup>13</sup>

The immediate reaction from the Wilhelmstrasse led to a temporary victory for Wilson. The German

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<sup>13</sup> John Dos Passos, Mr. Wilson's War (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), p. 142.

Foreign office gave the following assurances on September 1, : "Liners will not be sunk by our submarines without warning and without safety of the lives of noncombatants provided that the liners do not try to escape or offer resistance." <sup>14</sup>

Yet, the German submarine policy continued to be a vexing problem finally culminating into unrestricted warfare on February 1, 1917. The German's felt that the war would be over by the time America could bring substantial aid to European shores. The collapse of Russia relieving troops for the Western front prompted the Germans reckless policy.

Count Von Bernstorff, the German ambassador, was dismissed with the unmistakable approval of public opinion. American shipping lines suffered humiliation as a result of playing it safe by electing to stay in port. The congestion of American shipping constantly increased. The situation was intolerable for a nation such as the United States to endure. "On February 26, 1917, the President appeared before Congress, asking for powers enabling him to arm merchant ships and to take other necessary measures for the protection of American citizens

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

and property on the high seas." <sup>15</sup> On March 1, 1917, the House of Representatives passed the requested bill allowing merchant ships to arm. In the Senate a filibuster was organized to kill the bill for the session would close, Inaugural day, March 4. The filibuster succeeded; for, at noon on March 4, the session ended with no vote taken. "All that the overwhelming majority could accomplish was to draft a manifest, signed by seventy-five senators, indicating their approval of Wilson's Demand." <sup>16</sup>

Following the inaugural address, Wilson lived in the "valley of decision," according to Ray Stannard Baker. "For more than a week, far from well, he remained aloof in his private quarters; the usual cabinet meetings were not held, and he saw only a few callers." <sup>17</sup>

The overt act came in March with the sinking of the Conard Liner Laconia without warning. This act was quickly followed by the sinking of the food laden

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), Vol II, p. 454-455.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus Daniels, The Wilson Era: Years of War and After 1917-1923, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 45.

American steamer Algonquin and a week later the Vigilancia. After a unanimous opinion poll for war had been taken in a cabinet meeting on March 20, 1917, Wilson called a special session of Congress for April 2. Wilson caused many uncomfortable movements for his friends and colleagues by his hesitancy to make the decision. Only Colonel House knew the contents of the President's speech to Congress on April 2, before hand. "On the evening of April 2, 1917, Wilson appeared before Congress to ask that they declare the existence of a state of war between the United States and Germany." <sup>18</sup>

The world had known Wilson as a scholar, teacher, historian, and statesman. How could a man of peace, placed on a frail physical frame, be a successful war-time leader? This question was asked in many quarters.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



## CHAPTER II

### NAVAL STRATEGIST

Upon the entrance of the United States into the war, although the situation was obscured by censorship and by propaganda, "the fortunes of the allies were approaching their lowest ebb."<sup>19</sup> By the late summer of 1917, the Russians were through as an effective force for resistance. The favorable revolutionary government under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky's direction did not bring the desired result hoped for by the allies. General A. A. Brusilov's great offensives, after the initial success, had worn out the Russian armies in the field. The pressure on German troops in the east eased steadily.

French General Robert Georges Nivelles plan for a knockout blow against the German Hindenburg line in April of 1917 proved a disaster. "Nivelles failure shattered the morale of the armies."<sup>20</sup> By May, the French army was beset by wholesale mutinies.

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<sup>19</sup> John Dos Passos, Mr. Wilsons War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.) p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

The submarine menace continued to bring the British shipping tonnage available for supply of the islands to dangerous level. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig's, Commander of British forces in France, armies were faced with holding the German army at bay as a result of the French collapse.

Wilson, always interested in naval affairs, for, as a youth he aspired to attend the academy, stated in a speech early in 1916, "Ours should be the most adequate navy in the world." <sup>21</sup> Wilson, when quizzed about the statements advancing such a revolutionary naval policy, he replied, "It is one thing I said in my swing around the circle that I absolutely believe." <sup>22</sup>

In the months before we entered the war, the news about sinkings by the German U-boats indicated that the allies were losing the war. Wilson could not understand why the British did not use new and bold methods in combating the sting of the hornets; a term used by Wilson at times when referring to the submarine.

<sup>21</sup> Josephus Daniels, The Wilson Era: Years of War and After 1917-1923, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



According to Secretary of the Navy Daniels, Wilson was a strong advocate of the convoy system for protecting merchant ships months before the war started for the United States. Wilson felt the sinkings, early in the war, proved the sailing of ships separately as a failure.

There was some division among the American naval leaders to the recommended use of the convoy system. The President remained an advocate of the convoy system mostly because it was bold and new; and, standard methods of the past had proved inadequate. Wilson's choice of William S. Sims, a strong supporter of the convoy method, as our liaison to the British admiralty, demonstrated his strong feelings toward the convoy.

The President also had a theory based on the fact that the "hormets" had a nest and the allies knew where it was located. Instead of chasing the hornets all over the farm, why not destroy the nest or shut it up. To most, the task was too great to be practical. Wilson did find some support in the naval ordnance department; on April 15, the bureau of Ordnance offered a mine barrage plan. On April 16, Wilson had the Secretary of the Navy telegraph Admiral Sims, asking whether it was not

"practical to blockade German coasts efficiently and completely, thus making it practically impossible for German submarine movement." <sup>23</sup> Sims answered on April 18, that the plan would be wholly impracticable. Wilson would not let the matter rest as we shall see later.

While Sims was still aboard the U.S.S. New York enroute to England, the United States had declared war on Germany. The need for immediate decisions were discussed by British and French Admirals in the western Atlantic along with our own naval leaders. Wilson asked the naval authorities of the United States to exercise the utmost cordiality toward their British counterparts. The splendid cooperation between the British and the American navies continued throughout the war for the most part.

Wilson, in general, wanted to listen to all new ideas brought forward by anyone. All sorts of new inventions were brought to Washington. The use of mines in the channel areas of the approaches to the British Isles intrigued the President, but the emphasis on the convoy system and the barrage used up most of the material and personnel available.

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<sup>23</sup>Naval Investigation Hearings, January 8, 1920, Vol. I, p. 186.

While the President was casting about in March of 1917, for an American naval officer to work as Liaison with the British Admiralty, the name of Rear Admiral William S. Sims was brought forward. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy urged the appointment of Sims. Admiral Charles J. Badgers, President of the General Board also agreed with Roosevelt. Badgers' and Roosevelt's support for Sims centered around Sim's good relations with several of the members of the British Admiralty. Wilson, however, had many fears about Sims.

Sims did not fill the Wilsonian image of what an officer should be. Sims had distinguished himself well, but had been involved in a few incidents not to Wilson's liking. Sims had gone out of channels at times to gain the desired changes he sought. The admiral was outspoken, especially during a visit to the British Isles some years before the war.

Sims chummed around with the British quite often, especially when something new was in the works. When in command of the battleship Minnesota on a fraternal visit to England, the officers and men of the ship were entertained by the British navy. The entertainment culminated in a series of heady toasts and speeches; a

result of the champagne and beer that flowed through the evening. Commander Sims sent his cap sailing into the middle of his crew and called for a cheer that would raise the roof off the old Guildhall. "Then in his speech of thanks to the Lord Mayor and city of London for entertainment he declared that if ever the integrity of the Empire should be seriously threatened, the British could count on the assistance of every man, every ship, every dollar, and every drop of blood of their kinsman across the sea."<sup>24</sup> The incident created a storm of protest in the American and in the German press. Sims was relegated to the academic calm at the Naval War College, which gave him time to study convoys and the destroyer.

When war was imminent, Wilson called Sims to Washington in spite of Secretary Daniels' protests. Even though Wilson was not satisfied with some of Sims' behaviour, he felt Sims was the man to establish the splendid cooperation the President desired with our allies who had been fighting the war for nearly three years before we entered. The President also felt that if anyone could

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<sup>24</sup> John Dos Passos, Mr Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), p. 232.

find out the real situation, Sims could. Wilson let Sims know he was not selected for his speech at Guild hall but in spite of it.

Due to the fact that the United States was not in the war when Sims left for England, the admiral and his aide traveled incognito. The United States ship, New York, carrying Sims, struck a mine off the coast forcing the passengers to disembark prematurely. A flag officer met Sims on the dock and took him immediately to the admiralty where he met British Admiral John Jellicoe, a friend of long standing. Jellicoe, a full admiral, was in direct charge of naval operations. With hardly a word, Jellicoe gave Sims a piece of paper containing the real figures concerning shipping losses due to the German submarines. Sims was astounded at the figures. According to Jellicoe the situation was bad and was going to get worse. Sims remarked: "It looks as though the Germans were winning the war. They will win, unless we can stop these losses — and stop them soon." <sup>25</sup>

It was agreed the destroyer was the best weapon against the submarine. The problem being a shortage of

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<sup>25</sup>William Sims, The Victory at Sea, (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1920), p. 7.



destroyers. The British priority system of protecting the Grand Fleet and hospital ships before the cargo-carrying vessels, left few destroyers for the merchant marine. With repairs, refueling, and rest for their crews, the number of destroyers available for the essential supply line to the British Isles reached as low as three or four, at times. Sims sent the following message to Washington on April 24: "Situation continues critical. Nine vessels sunk yesterday. Recommend that all destroyers now available be sent earliest possible date." <sup>26</sup> A flotilla of six destroyers sailed for England the same day of Sims' message.

When Sims brought up the convoy idea, Jellicoe, without hesitation, listed several reasons why convoys were impracticable. The main objection against the use of convoys according to Jellicoe included the already apparent shortage of available destroyers and the opinion that merchant marine captains could not acclimate themselves to the convoy system. "For the discipline required

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<sup>26</sup> Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters; Warleader, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), Vol. VII, p. 34.

for large numbers of ships traveling together under rigid discipline and constantly changing directions would ~~tax~~ the rugged individualism practiced by the old seaboys of the merchant marine." <sup>27</sup> Others in the British Admiralty were against the convoy idea; in theory, for they felt the system would increase losses. "With large numbers of ships sailing on the seas together, a submarine captain would be delighted to have several ships to torpedo instead of one." <sup>28</sup>

The President's continued pressure for bold actions was unnecessary, for Sims was constantly trying to win over the British for the convoy system. The urgency of the situation was causing every new idea to be explored on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, but the British were slow to move away from time honored naval practices.

Finally, with Prime Minister Lloyd George pressuring the British Admiralty, a convoy experiment was allowed. On May 20, 1917, the first convoy arrived

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<sup>27</sup> William Sims, The Victory at Sea, (New York: Doubleday and Page, and Company, 1920), p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

from Gibraltar without a loss of a single ship. "The next day the Admiralty appointed a board to set up a convoy system." <sup>29</sup>

The real success of the convoy system was not apparent in Washington until late in July, for on July 4, Wilson sent the following message to Admiral Sims.

"For Admiral Sims, confidential from the President: From the beginning of the war I have been surprised by nothing so much as the failure of the British Admiralty to use Great Britain's great naval superiority in any effective way. In the presence of the present submarine emergency they are helpless to the point of pain. Every plan we suggest they reject for some reason of prudence. In my view, this is not a time for prudence but for boldness even at the risk of great losses. In most of your dispatches you have very properly advised us of the sort of aid and cooperation desired from us by the Admiralty. The trouble is that their plans and methods do not seem to us effective. I would be very much obliged to you if you would report to me, confidentially of course, exactly what the Admiralty have been doing and what they have accomplished

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 114.



and add to report your own comments and suggestions based upon independent study of the whole situation without regard to the judgments already arrived at on that side of the water. I do not see how the necessary military supplies and supplies of food and fuel oil are to be delivered at British ports in any other way than under convoy. There will presently not be ships enough or tankers enough, and our shipbuilding plans may not begin to yield important results in less than eighteen months. I beg that you will keep these instructions absolutely to yourself and that you will give me such advice as you would give if you were handling an independent navy of your own."

At the time Wilson sent his message to Sims, the convoy system, was actually being used quite extensively. The number of destroyers being used; in the European theatre of the war by this time had reached the twenties; and, due to Sims' constant requests, more were on the way. In answering the President's message of July 4, Sims outlined several suggestions. The navy department complied with the admiral's wishes except for the request for more dreadnaughts. The President and Daniels felt that American coastal defenses would be stripped to the bone to satisfy Sims appetite for more ships.

In early autumn of 1916, the German submarine's ability to cross the Atlantic was made a fact when the famous German submarine Captain Hans Rose paid a call at Newport, Rhode Island; and, "On the way back, sank a few merchant vessels of ~~Norfolk~~." <sup>30</sup> Sims was aware of possible trans-Atlantic submarines and warned the Navy Department at Washington in several letters and cables in the spring of 1917. For this reason Wilson would not leave our coast wid of what he figured to be the necessary protection.

Things moved rapidly during the last of July. The real results of the convoy system began to take focus. Admiral Sims reported that "the success of the convoys so far brought in, shows that the system will defeat the submarine campaign if applied generally and in time." <sup>31</sup> The navy responded with every vessel available to combat the dreaded submarine. Sims, as will be noted later, was never satisfied with the amount of ships or personnel he received.

<sup>30</sup>William Sims, The Victory at Sea, (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920), p. 266.

<sup>31</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), Vol. VII, p. 179.

At the request of Secretary Daniels, Wilson made an informal and confidential speech to the Atlantic Fleet in the protected waters off Yorktown. The speech deserves mentioning in order to demonstrate the surprising understanding the President had for the men of the navy and the task before them. In part, his speech of August 1, 1917, aboard the Pennsylvania was as follows:

Here are two great navies, not to speak of the others associated with us, our own and the British, outnumbering by a very great margin the navy to which we are opposed and, yet, casting about for a way in which to use our superiority and our strength, because of the novelty of the instruments used because of the unprecedented character of the war; because, as I said just now, nobody ever before fought a war like this, in the way that this is being fought at sea, or on land either, for that matter. Nobody can pretend to be a professional. Now somebody has got to think the war out. Somebody has got to think out a way not only to fight the submarine but to do something different from what we are doing.

We are hunting hornets all over the farm and letting the nest alone . . .  
I am willing to sacrifice half the navy,

Great Britain and we together have to crush it the next, because if we crush it the war is going to be won . . . I am ready to put myself at the disposal of any officer in the navy who thinks he knows how to run this war . . . We have got to throw tradition to the winds. Every time we have suggested any thing to the British Admiralty the reply has come back that virtually amounts to this, that it had never been done that way, and I felt like saying: Well nothing was ever done so systematically as nothing is being done now.

America . . . is the prize amateur nation of the world. Germany is the prize professional nation. Now when it comes to doing new things and doing them well, I will back the amateur against the professional every time because the professional does it out of the book and the amateur does it with his eyes open upon a new world and a new set of circumstances . . . Do not stop to think about what is prudent for a moment. Do the thing that is audacious . . . because that is exactly the thing the other side does not understand . . . So gentlemen, besides coming down to say how absolutely I rely on you and believe in you and to give my

personal greeting, I have come down to say also that I depend upon you, depend on you for brains as well as training and courage and discipline.

Wilson's desire to find a way to stop the ingress and egress of German submarines was so intent that the Bureau of Ordnance kept up continuing work to find a method to stop the flight of the hornets from the nest. On April 15, the Bureau offered a plan to establish a mine barrage across the North Sea. Secretary Daniels asked Sims about the practicability of a blockade of the German coast. Sims' answer to a barrage across the North Sea was negative. The British had very little success in mining German submarine home channels. German mine sweepers usually were successful in keeping the channels open. "To have struted the North Sea barrage in the spring and summer of 1917 would have meant abandoning the convoy system and this would have been sheer madness." <sup>32</sup>

The British felt the barrage was not feasible, for the shortage of ships and men to lay the barrage and guard it after it was laid was too great to get

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<sup>32</sup>William Sims, The Victory at Sea, (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920), p. 41.



the job done. Besides the present contact mines were not adequate to do the job over such a long distance.

Wilson would not turn loose of his idea centered around the barrage. Wilson renewed his pressure on the British Admiralty and Sims when a new mine was developed. The new mine with its electrical device would explode even if a submarine passed close to it. The British stalled any action by delaying action until an adequate supply of the new mines were available. Finally, all obstacles were removed and work began on the North Sea barrage. Most of the burden of laying the mine field fell on the Americans. The drab and perilous task was completed in October of 1918.

Although the war was nearly over by the time the barrage was completed, some concrete results were evident. The evidence established by both American and British authorities set the submarine losses from 10 to 23. Considering the short time the barrage was in use, the results were gratifying. Some hints from German sources infer the barrage played some part in German naval results in early November, 1918. Admiral Sims stated, "It was the failure of the submarine campaign which defeated

the German hopes and forced their surrender; and in this defeat the barrage was an important element." <sup>33</sup>

Wilson's success as a naval strategist is not willingly accepted in naval circles even today, but the fact remains he knew naval history and advocated several new systems and devices which proved successful in naval operations. Whether time will give Wilson a place along side of George Washington, who was considered a great civilian naval strategist, only time will tell.

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<sup>33</sup> ibid., p. 161-263.

## CHAPTER III

### WILSON AND THE ARMY

With Admiral Sims on his way to Europe before the war had started for the United States, the navy had a jump on the army in direct involvement in the war. Even months later the pressing need seemed to be for the navy and shipping in general.

Many congressional leaders and Wilson himself thought it very possible that the war would be over soon and that the need for mass military mobilization would not be needed. We could send over a token force and what ever volunteers that wanted to go and let it go at that. The professional character of the war and the worn out state of the French and English land forces soon caused some immediate changes in the thinking about the need for a large army and the necessity for trained professional people to conduct the fighting and do the fighting.



Another problem that must be kept in mind was the fact that the United States had never had to get ready for a war of this scope before demanding the expedition of such masses of men and materials. No precedents had been established for transatlantic war involving most of the world. Yet, after a sluggish beginning, the United States had by the close of the war over a million troops in the American Expeditionary Force in France.

The theme in Washington and throughout the United States in general, after we did enter the war, was how do you organize and fight a world war where the armies are fighting thousands of miles away. Our involvement before the war on the sea gave the United States some appreciation of the needs; in the navy, Wilson's casting about looking for shipping to bring American nationals home caused an awareness of shipping needs. The army did not benefit from early involvement; and, as a result, our military posture was little different than it had been a year before entering the war. General John J. Pershing, future commander of American forces in Europe, stated "the inaction played into the hands of

Germany, for she knew how long it would take us to put an army in the field and governed her action accordingly." <sup>34</sup> "Thus, through a false notion of neutrality, which had prevented practically all previous preparations, a favorable opportunity to assist the allies was lost." <sup>35</sup>

Wilson's attitude toward preparedness was positive in reality. At least, it was positive to the President and to many Americans. Wilson asked for a reasonable preparedness which meant the defense measures he asked for were for defense only. "He could still see no involvement for America in the war." <sup>36</sup>

Wilson did not assume the roll of a wartime leader until after we entered the war. This created a leadership vacuum. From election time in 1916 until we actually entered the war in April of 1917, we remained nationless so far as preparedness was concerned. When war was declared, Wilson did come forward to lead his country.

<sup>34</sup> John Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

Wilson demonstrated a fighting posture. "By every honourable means he had sought to avoid the issue, but a truculent foe had made war necessary, and into that war the peace-loving President went with the grim resolution of an iron warrior." <sup>37</sup> The President came out of his lethargy wanting to smash hornets in their nests and a firm desire to go the limit.

At a time when preparedness appeared to be a sound policy, problems in Mexico needed immediate attention and war was in the offering, the appointment of a known pacifist seemed to be madness. Newton D. Baker after personally professing his unfitness for the position as Secretary of War, was asked by the President whether or not he was ready to be sworn in.

The reaction in the selection of Baker as Secretary of War in Washington was immediate. All of the opponents of the administration were stirred to loud protests and scorn. Supporters of the administration, who welcomed the policy of neutrality but who believed the United States should increase its

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson as I Know Him, (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1921), p. 294.

military preparedness, regretted that a weak pacifist should be placed in the position of Secretary of War.

The newspapers had liked Garrison, for he was a reporters delight because of his continental army plans. Part of Wilson's and of Garrison's problems had stemmed from the former secretaries desire for public exposure on matters the President felt were confidential. When the new secretary was being inducted, the Mexican situation caused immediate action from the new secretary. A newspaper man asked Baker what he was going to do about the Mexican situation. "What the President tells me to do," <sup>35</sup> was his answer. Baker, a known pacifist, now had proved himself a rubber stamp. Baker was off to something considerably less than an auspicious start with the public.

Baker, the pacifist, who said he would fight for peace, during the preparedness fight, suggested a stronger approach to a military build up. Finally on June 3, 1916, a bill called the National Defense Act was passed. The bill was heralded as a measure for defense only. "Suggestions

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<sup>35</sup>Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, America at War (New York: Dodd-Mead and Company, 1931), Vol. 1, p. 10.

from the War Department that we increase appropriations with a view to putting the American army on a better footing case of hostilities would have been regarded as provocation." <sup>39</sup> This act was all Congress was willing to give.

It is worth noting at this time that Baker, with the Mexican situation in mind, anticipated the passage of the National Defense Act, for he started organizing recruiting agencies before the act. "In anticipation of the increase, new recruiting stations were opened as soon as Pershing crossed the border into Mexico." <sup>40</sup> All old methods of recruiting were used plus several new one's were started. "But the most persuasive capitalization of the adventure of Pershing's chase of Pancho Villa and the prospect of a march to Mexico City had small response in a period of prosperity when the war babies' were booming in Wall Street and jobs were plentiful at high wages in making munitions for the allies." <sup>41</sup> Some months later

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

the problems in recruiting would face Baker again.

After the National Defense Act was passed, the 1916 elections stepped to center stage. Wilson won a close election, resulting from western support for his attitude of staying out of the war. The bubble of neutrality burst when Germany announced the intention of resuming unrestricted submarine warfare on January 29, 1917.

In February, Baker announced his intention to raise our army by a draft. This news was met with almost complete approval by the military. "But what would the Congress say to this brash proposal?"<sup>42</sup> The eventual commander of the American Expeditionary Force, General John Pershing, was in support of the draft. In Pershing's opinion the draft was necessary and vital to our success in the war. The general demonstrated his strong feelings by "persuading the Governor of Texas that conscription was sound in principle and got him to exert his influence with the Texas delegation in Congress in favor of it."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>43</sup> John Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), Vol. 1, p. 13.



The War Department according to Baker's Instructions drew up a plan for the conduct of the draft. Baker proved to be no rubber stamp where the draft was concerned. "On the margins of the paragraphs of this project in the War College archives are his 'No' 'Approved' or 'Impracticable' and comment to the effect that what was right in principle must wait on the turn of events or upon the Presidential policy." <sup>44</sup> Many of his judgments proved remarkable considering they were prompt decisions and made before the fact of war; of course, some were revealed to be mistakes.

Four days after the war message was delivered to Congress, Wilson came out in support of the draft by making public statement "approving the selective draft legislation which the War Department had presented to the military committee of the Senate and House." <sup>45</sup> The President also let it be known that the draft would last only as long as the war lasted.

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<sup>44</sup>Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, America At War, (New York: Dodd-Mead and Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 93.

<sup>45</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters, Warleader, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), Vol. VII, p. 13.

Many came out against the draft, charges of militarism were heard throughout the land. Others believed we had no need for such measures and that the volunteer system would supply our needs. Some opponents pictured riots and bloodshed in the attempt to force conscription. "Its opponents forgot that during the Civil War the volunteer system had given Mr. Lincoln and his ~~consider~~ no end of trouble; and that in order to provide war power, the North was finally forced to adopt conscription."<sup>46</sup> Also, the British in the present war were forced to resort to the draft to keep her ranks filled.

The draft bill was passed on May 18, 1917. The opponents were unable to make any changes that effected the original bill. Wilson put his idealistic touch to the draft bill on the same day; he signed it with the following statement: "It is in no sense a conscription of the unwilling; it is, rather, selection from a nation which has volunteered in mass."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), Vol. II, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, America at War, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 194.

He also cited the fact that in past wars the United States had allowed proven soldiers in battle to form volunteer units for immediate dispatch to the fighting.

Roosevelt did not hesitate to take his cause personally to the President. "The object of the colonel's call was discussed without heat or bitterness." <sup>48</sup>

Wilson did not shut the door completely, the President quietly stated the War Department's stand on the volunteer system. Roosevelt left knowing that the President was impressed.

On May 18, the conscription act was passed with "Roosevelt's four divisions incorporated in it. The provision was added that these divisions should be activated at the President's discretion." <sup>49</sup> Wilson immediately issued a statement supporting the conscription act and that he agreed with the War Department "that this was a war for professionals and not for amateurs." <sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson as I Knew Him, (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1921), p. 285.

<sup>49</sup> John Dos Passos, Mr Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), p. 214.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

The decision whether political or not was sound, for Roosevelt's physical condition at 59 did not warrant field command. Baker strongly believed Roosevelt not to be fit to lead troops from a physical or from a professional standpoint.

The method by which the whole affair was handled gave honor to both the President and to the Secretary of War. Baker, as head of the War Department was allowed to make his own decision as to policy. Wilson had demonstrated his faith in his choice of Baker. The New York Times had the following to say about the affair on May 20:

"With all deference to Mr. Roosevelt, who in his most stirring mood is still a commanding figure in the national foreground, it must be said that the President has disposed of his proposal to form an expeditionary military force, apart from the general army scheme of the government in the most reasonable way. Our military operations must be kept in charge of military men." <sup>51</sup>

The President and the Secretary of War were in harmony when Wilson decided on John J. Pershing as the military commander of the American Expeditionary Force

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<sup>51</sup> New York Times, Section 1, p. 2, column 1.

to Europe. Wilson chose Pershing for several reasons. Pershing not only maintained views similar to Wilson's on basic points such as keeping America together as a unit but also fit the image of being a competent officer not subject to radical behavior.

Baker supported Pershing, for he knew the General's abilities first hand. "All reports agreed that Pershing could hold his own on long rides as well as when he had been a captain of cavalry."<sup>52</sup> Pershing had the benefit of observing large armies at war as a military attache in the Russo-Japanese War. His experiences in Mexico proved valuable. "The problem of supplying ten thousand men in hostile country taught the War Department and Baker things they had never dreamed of procurement and logistics."<sup>53</sup>

Wilson told Pershing upon the General's arrival to Washington, "you were chosen entirely upon your record; and, I have every confidence that you will succeed; and

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<sup>52</sup>Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, American at War (New York: Dodd-Mead and Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 165.

<sup>53</sup>John Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 27.



you shall have my full support." <sup>54</sup> The President meant what he said about his confidence in Pershing and the offer of full support. "In the actual conduct of operations I was given entire freedom and in this respect was to enjoy an experience unique in our history." <sup>55</sup>

Pershing's arrival in Europe was greeted with almost unbelievable fanfare and emotion from the allied countries. The excitement for the most part was with the people. The English and the French military were more interested in how soon the Americans could send troops and whether it would be in time.

By the end of 1917 the situation looked bad for the allies. The collapse of Russia and the central powers' success in Italy caused a depressing climate over the allies. General Pershing telegraphed Secretary Baker: "There is considerable talk of possibilities of peace this winter. French people in state of mind to accept any favorable proposition. Recent British attacks beginning with latter part of July have been very

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<sup>54</sup> John Dos Passos, Mr. Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 37.



costly and British morale not as high as two months ago." <sup>56</sup> American military efforts were urged to move more swiftly by all of our allies in Europe.

The understanding with the United States and with Pershing at the beginning of the war, was that there would be no American units fighting under British or under French flags. Wilson and Baker agreed to let Pershing be the judge on the placement of American troops. Pershing's feeling at this early stage of the war were as follows: "I was decidedly against our becoming a recruiting agency for either the French or British and at that time this was the attitude of the War Department also. While fully realizing the difficulties, it was definitely understood between the Secretary of War and myself that we should proceed to organize our own units from top to bottom and build a distinctive army of our own as rapidly as possible." <sup>57</sup>

"British and French pressure continued throughout the war for American companies to be infiltrated into

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

British and French units. The allies were finding it so difficult to get replacements for their losses the American's seemed a logical source of manpower. Ambassador Walter Page and Admiral Sims both urged the War Department to comply with the wishes of the allies. Wilson's reply when these pressures were disclosed to him by Secretary Baker at a cabinet meeting was, "we will have an American army or none." <sup>58</sup>

Late in December of 1917, the allies again tried to gain the use of American troops in British and in French units. The collapse of Russia and the impending German offensive caused great alarm in the allied camp. By December several thousand American troops were in France.

Wilson's stand was beginning to weaken as a result of the heavy pressure from allied leaders. Even some of our own military people were applying pressure to infiltrate our forces into British and French divisions.. Admiral Sims was in favor of sifting our forces into allied divisions, and General Bliss believed in at least an Anglo-Saxon combination.

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<sup>58</sup> Josephus Daniels, The Wilson Era: Years of War and After 1917-1923, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 163.

The following cable to Pershing from Baker on December 25, 1917, "demonstrates the softening of administration policy. Yet, there was still unwillingness to attempt to dictate to the commander of the A. E. F." 59

Both English and French are pressing upon the President their desire to have your forces amalgamated with theirs by regiments and companies, and both express belief in impending heavy drive by Germans somewhere along the line of the western front. We do not desire loss of identity of our forces but regard that as secondary to the meeting of any critical situation by the most helpful use possible of the troops at your command. The difficulty of course is to determine where the drive or drives of the enemy will take place, and in advance of some knowledge on that question, any redistribution of your forces would be difficult. The President, however, desires you to have full authority to use the forces at your command as you deem wise in consultation with the French and British commanders-in-chief.

It is suggested for your consideration that possibly places might be selected for your forces nearer the junction of the

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<sup>59</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: War Leader, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), p. 417.

British and French lines, which would enable you to know your strength in whichever direction seemed most necessary. This suggestion is not, however, pressed beyond whatever merit it has in your judgment, the President's sole purpose being to acquaint you with the representations made here and to authorize you to act with entire freedom in making the best possible disposition and use of your forces for accomplishing the main purposes in view. It is hoped that complete unity and co-ordination of action can be secured in the matter by your conferences with the French and British commanders. Report result of any conferences you may have with French and British commanders and line of action that may be agreed upon.

On January 3, 1918, Pershing answered the Baker cable saying he did not think the situation warranted the involvement of American troops in the fashion suggested. "Main objections are: first, 'troops would lose their national identity; and, second, they probably could not be relieved for service with us without disrupting the allied division."<sup>60</sup> Pershing also mentioned the fact of our training methods

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<sup>60</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: War Leader, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), Vol. VII, p. 417.

being different and suggested the possibility of prejudice between French and British over the allotment of American forces if used.

Pershing desired very much for Secretary Baker to come to France to see first hand the situation he had been trying to write about for the past four months. President Wilson in a letter to Baker, gave his opinion of Baker's impending trip: "I believe that it will add to the morale, not only of our forces there, but of our forces here, to feel that you are personally conversant with all the conditions of their transportation and treatment on the other side."<sup>61</sup> The President also felt the comprehensive views the Secretary would bring back would enlighten the vision in the administration in general.

Baker was met by Pershing at a railroad station in Paris on the morning of March 10. During Baker's short stay, he visited most of America's military depots, ships, docks, staging centers, and trenches themselves. The morale factor in itself warranted the trip.

Probably the greatest understanding and appreciation of the war resulted from the fact that the great German

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<sup>61</sup> Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters, War-Leader, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company Inc., 1939), Vol. VII, p. 562.



offensive was just opening up while Coker was in France. According to Walter Page, our ambassador to the Great Britain, "No visit in history has ever been better timed." <sup>62</sup>

Before the United States entered the war, the allies practiced almost independent action in military procedures. These conditions still existed when the United States entered the war. Wilson immediately upon our entrance into the war, started action to select a supreme commander. In November, some of the leaders were persuaded to the President's way of thinking. A conference was held at Rapallo in Italy to discuss the advisability of a unified command. Action was taken at Rapallo in favor of a Supreme War Council. Several opponents were heard from, expressing doubts and jealousies. Wilson, on November 17, approved the action taken. "The President's action strengthened the hands of those who favored the council and probably became the influence that saved it." <sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Burton Hendrick, The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922), Vol. II, p. 354.

<sup>63</sup> John Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), Vol. I, p. 215.



The Supreme War Council, once it was established, proved embarrassing to the United States for a time. "While the step of giving to a common agency control of the war operations of the allies on the various fronts had, from the first, been advocated by President Wilson."<sup>64</sup> The fact that we were not at war with Austria-Hungary caused our involvement in the Supreme War Council to be limited to the war on the western front. The problem was eliminated by our declaration of war on Austria-Hungary December 7, 1917.

General Ferdinand Foch was to become Supreme Allied Commander of allied forces. Wilson supported Foch as far back as January 10, for the position. "By his influence on England, Mr. Wilson from that moment never ceased to pave the way for the decision reached in March, 1918."<sup>65</sup>

Foch actually did not receive full authority as allied commander until April 3, when statesmen and generals,

<sup>64</sup>Robert Lansing, War Memoirs, (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1935), p. 257.

<sup>65</sup>Lavre Tordieu, France and America, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Doran Company, 1921), p. 235.

including Pershing, met at Beauvois where they adopted the following resolution:

General Foch is charged by the British, French, and American governments with the coordination of the action of the allied armies of the western front. To this end all powers necessary to secure effective realization are conferred on him. The British, French, and American governments for this purpose entrust the General with the strategic direction of military operations. The commanders-in-chief of the British, French, and American armies have full control of the tactical employment of their forces. Each commander-in-chief will have the right of appeal.

The last sentence gave each country the opportunity to slip the knot of authority if the need arose. Still, the resolution offered an immense concession to unification of action in time to meet the German offensive at its height.

General Foch proved his worth giving relief to the supporters of unified command. The German fourth offensive under able German General Von Ludendorff was set to burst the door to Paris wide open. "The French master, General

Foch, appeared at his best against the German master." <sup>66</sup>  
 The French, veterans realizing the stakes, rose to the occasion by stopping the German advance almost in its tracks.

Early in the war, our allies did not expect many soldiers from us, so the theme was to take our bits and pieces and weave them into the allied forces blanketing the western front.

The pressure for the use of American troops continued on into 1918. General Shoen, during an emotional moment, exclaimed, "For God's sake get your men over here for you have got to finish it." <sup>67</sup> According to Ambassador Page, "the simple fact was that both the French and the British armies were practically bled white." <sup>68</sup>

Pershing "a master of his great place, with all his caution and positive way felt the weight of allied

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<sup>66</sup> Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, America at War (New York: Dodd-Mead and Company, 1931), Vol. II, p. 251.

<sup>67</sup> Burton Hendrich, The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1922), p. 354.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 354.

pressure during the early stages of the great German offensive in late winter of 1918." <sup>69</sup>

Pershing's patience in waiting until we had adequate forces in France trained to fight the kind of fight offered on the western front caused several episodes. French Premier Georges Clemenceau, ran out of patience with Pershing on various occasions. In a letter to Foch, the Premier even spoke of seeking the dismissal of Pershing.

Finally, in the early spring, Pershing thought some American units were ready for combat. The first division met the enemy in May of 1918 in what was termed a successful engagement for the Americans. "Pershing's carefulness and thoroughness had their reward." <sup>70</sup>

To England and France, the American success had little merit, but the enemy did take note of the affair that took place at Chateau-Thierry. The famous German field marshal Von Hindenburg wrote the following about

<sup>69</sup> Charles Daves, A Journal of the Great War, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), Vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, America at War, (New York: Dodd-Mead and Company, 1931), Vol. II, p. 251.

the American part in the battle: "Now another factor was at work, the help of America. At Chateau-Thierry they had attacked us, and proved themselves clumsily but firmly led." <sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Von Hindenburg, Out of My Life, (London and New York: Cassell and Company Limited, 1920), p. 410.

## CHAPTER IV

### ARMISTICE: UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

By the early fall of 1918, the great German offensives of the year had come to an end. The weight of allied pressure, including the ever growing number of American troops committed on the western front forced the Germans into defensive actions along the front. August 8, has been marked as a black day in German military history. On this day the allied attack swept forward while the enemy, "taken wholly by surprise by the violence and rapidity of the allies, fell back in confusion. More than 13,000 prisoners were captured."<sup>72</sup>

In late September hints of German desires for an armistice were beginning to be heard. Von Hindenburg stated . . . "the situation is daily growing more acute."<sup>73</sup> The first official German armistice note was dated October 3.

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<sup>72</sup>Ferdinand Foch, The Memoirs of Marshal Foch, trans. Bently Mott, (Garden City New York: Doubleday and Doran and Company, 1931), p. 379.

<sup>73</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters: An Autobiography (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1939), Vol. VIII, p. 447.



The first German note was directed to President Wilson. Wilson immediately informed our allies of the German note. Conferences followed at Versailles with all allies represented.

Senator Lodge and Roosevelt immediately took vigorous action against an armistice. Roosevelt made charges against the administration's position by claiming a sellout without victory. Lodge wrote Roosevelt: "... at this point, if we make an armistice we have lost the war and we shall have Germany about where she started. I am sure that the American people want a complete victory and an unconditional surrender." <sup>74</sup>

The President's answer to the first German note sought clarification of German meanings, intentions, and just who was being represented by the note. The answer was, in reality, more an inquiry than a reply, according to the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing.

A second German note was officially made known on October 14. The note answered the President's inquiry

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<sup>74</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, The Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt & H. C. Lodge, (New York: G. Scribner's Sons, 1925), Vol. II, p. 540.

by accepting the President's earlier expressed guidelines made in a speech by the President on January 3. At the request of the Prince of Baden, the note included a request, "that the governments of the powers associated with the United States also accept the position taken by President Wilson in his addresses." <sup>75</sup>

Wilson's position, at this point, was very delicate. Factions of the senate were still claiming an armistice would be like admitting defeat. Some opponents believed the present German government insincere and demanded our dealings should be with a government more representative of the German people.

American allies were alarmed for fear Wilson would play a lone hand and offer an armistice unsuitable to England and to France. A split in the allied camp would be bad at this time.

Even with these fears, the parties concerned could not resist the pressure for peace. Pershing with increasing divisions of fresh troops now experiencing victory was a strong supporter of unconditional surrender.

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<sup>75</sup>Max Von Baden, Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden, (Berlin and Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags, Unftalt, Stuttgart, 1920), Vol. II, p. 75.

The President truly had a maze to work through to satisfy all concerned at home and abroad. "If one went in at the right entrance, he reached the center, but if one took the wrong turning, it was necessary to go out again and do it over." <sup>75</sup>

The President soon formulated his reply and in late afternoon sent it:

" . . . the process of evacuation and the conditions of an armistice . . . must be left to the judgment and advice of the military advisers of the Government of the United States and the Allied Governments . . . no arrangement can be accepted by the Government of the United States which does not provide absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees of the maintenance of the present military supremacy of the armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field . . .

The President feels that it is also his duty to add that neither the Government of the United States nor, he is quite sure, the Governments with which the Government of the United States is associated as a belligerent will consent to consider an armistice so long as the word

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<sup>76</sup>Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson: Life & Letters: Armistice, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1939), Vol. VIII, p. 447.

forces of Germany continue the illegal and inhumane practices which they still persist in . . .

It is necessary; also in order that there may be no possibility of misunderstanding, that the President should very solemnly call the attention of the Government of Germany to the language and plain intent of one of the terms of peace which the German Government has now accepted. It is contained in the address of the President delivered at Mount Vernon on the fourth of July last. It is as follows: 'The destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world, or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at least its reduction to virtual impotency.' The power which has hitherto controlled the German Nation is of the sort here described. It is within the choice of the German Nation to alter it . . . The President feels bound to say that the whole process of peace will, in his judgment, depend upon the definiteness and the satisfactory character of the guarantees which can be given in this fundamental matter. It is indispensable

that the Governments associated  
against Germany should know beyond a  
peradventure with whom they are  
dealing . . . " 77

Wilson followed his reply with public statements  
on behalf of liberty loans and continued troop  
movements to France. The President wanted known the  
armistice possibilities did not diminish the need for  
money and for men.

France continued to have fears that Germany was  
on the verge of escaping defeat and the French would be  
denied the desire to render Germany unable to attack  
France again. England asked for immediate guarantee that  
if the armistice was signed that Germany would be unable  
to renew hostilities.

The third German note complied with Wilson's reply  
for the most part. To Wilson's cabinet, it appeared  
enough to justify the establishment of an armistice with-  
out continued and increase in demands.

Wilson was not satisfied that the Germans had been  
asked to yield enough in view of allied pressures. His  
third reply ended up being very little short of an  
unconditional surrender. The reply incorporated positive

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77 Ibid., p. 477.



evidence of civilized warfare on land and sea, must be demonstrated by Germany, that the Germans, upon signing the armistice, the ability for Germany to renew hostilities would be impossible. Wilson made it very clear that if the United States had to deal with the Imperial Government now or in the future, the conditions must be a surrender on the part of Germany. "Nothing can be gained by leaving this essential thing unsaid." <sup>78</sup>

Immediate reaction to the Presidential reply to the third German note on October 23 followed the party line politically. The newspapers were generally favorable. Our allies had mixed feelings. The military seemed to some degree to be objectionable. The German military feeling was that the reply was extremely strong.

The fact is that the German Imperial Government, after the Wilson reply, began to fall victim to internal revolution from several political forces which were followed by some civilian and military elements. On November 9, the end came officially for the Kaiser who voluntarily renounced the throne. "Germany lacking any

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<sup>78</sup>Woodrow Wilson, Wilson, Public Papers, ed. by Ray Baker and William Dodd, (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1928), Vol. V, p. 285.



firm hand, bereft of all will, robbed of her princes, collapsed like a house of cards." <sup>79</sup>

The new government under Friedrich Ebert, a Social Democrat, wasted little time in complying with all demands by the allies and an Armistice was signed at five o'clock in the morning on November 11, 1918.

With the signing of the Armistice, the war comes to an end; for, "having accepted these terms of armistice, it will be impossible for the German command to renew it." <sup>80</sup> Now begins the struggle to establish a lasting peace.

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<sup>79</sup>Paul Von Ludendorff, Ludendorff's Own Story, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), Vol. II, p. 429.

<sup>80</sup>Woodrow Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's Own Story, ed. by Donald Gray, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1952), p. 298.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Woodrow Wilson had met the challenge of the twentieth-century war. "In the hour of crises, he proved himself quick to perceive essentials in new conditions and wise to have men who could aid in defining policies and could be trusted to execute them with zeal and intelligence." <sup>81</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt continuously charged Wilson's war measures were wasteful and inefficient. With some slight justification, Roosevelt's harangues caused movement towards senatorial control of the President's wartime powers. "He deserved a better fate, yet the threat from the senate did spur Wilson on." <sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Arthur Waborn, Woodrow Wilson: World Prophet, (New York and London, and Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1953), Vol. II, p. 121.

<sup>82</sup> John Blum, Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), p. 140.

"The Wilsonian wartime effort culminated with almost complete success in November, 1918."<sup>83</sup> The central powers had been defeated and forced to accept American leadership in peace making. President Wilson had reached the height of his prestige, and the future seemed bright indeed.

Wilson followed a bi-partisan policy in choosing most of his war ministry in the all important Advisory Commission. Herbert Hoover, a republican, headed the Food Administration. One of Wilson's most successful choices for the Advisory Commission was Bernard M. Baruch. "Baruch, through cajolment and patriotic appeal, won over raw materials with complete success."<sup>84</sup> Many other dollar a year men, as the former entrepreneurs were sometimes called, did outstanding services for the country.

Although Wilson was known as scholar, teacher,

<sup>83</sup>David Trask, The United States in the Supreme War Council, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 175.

<sup>84</sup>John Dos Passos, Mr. Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 232.

and executive, he did have a grasp of Army and Navy policies and operations. "His personal interest and influence had a marked effect on the conduct of the war." <sup>85</sup> Marshal Joffre while visiting in the United States, was surprised at the President's "perfect mastery of the military situation." <sup>86</sup>

In military affairs, Wilson would follow the debates of the experts with keen interest. He would dispose of the minds he thought lacked the necessary balance and freshness for leadership. "He knew a dry sponge on sight." <sup>87</sup> Wilson took a deeper interest in naval affairs. He had a love for the sea and at one time had an ambition of attending the Naval Academy. The President constantly sought fresh ideas for combating the submarine. "He was willing to sacrifice half the

<sup>85</sup> Josephus Daniels, The Wilson Era: Years of War and After 1917-1923, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson as I Know Him, (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1921), p. 293.

<sup>87</sup> Arthur Walworth, Woodrow Wilson: World Prophet, (New York and London and Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1958), Vol. II, p. 108.

navies of the United States and Britain to crush the  
~~German~~'s' nest, he said, because if they could do that  
 the war ~~could~~ be won." <sup>88</sup>

With the war over, the ~~important~~ work to be done  
 was ~~now~~ evident to Wilson. That work would represent  
 the ~~greatest~~ collective achievement of all time, the  
 lasting peace of the world; and, it could be accomplished  
 through the peace treaty and through the establishment  
 of the League of Nations. However, the singular interest  
 of the allies leadership would prove to be beyond Wilson's  
 understanding.

Lloyd George of England probably understood the  
 twentieth century better than anyone at the peace con-  
 ference. Yet, his political ambitions and his fixed  
 sights on British expansion caused a loss of reality in  
 the peace treaty. Lloyd George was ~~all~~ in his attitude  
 toward Germany in comparison to his attitude toward  
 Clemenceau of France. "He had two ~~intertwined~~ objections —  
 revenge and French security. These, as he saw it,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

entailed the absolute destruction of German power, existing or potential." 89

Both Lloyd George and Clemenceau feared Wilson would be hard to deal with. They communicated their doubts to House. "House affably assured them that they would not find the President stiff and dictatorial in personal relations." 90

As the President prepared to leave for Europe, his mind was full of high ideals about establishing a new world order founded on the people's desire for a lasting peace based on freedom and honesty. "With an obtuseness to reality that he often showed when purposes that he held sacred were at stake, he remarked that the peoples of Europe were being betrayed by leaders who did not truly represent them." 91

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89 John Blum, Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), p. 165.

90 John Dos Passos, Dr. Wilson's War, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 440.

91 Arthur Walworth, Woodrow Wilson: World Prophet, (New York and London and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1958), Vol. II, p. 219.



When parting from friends in New York, Wilson predicted that his trip would be either "the greatest success or the supreme tragedy in all history." <sup>92</sup>

Wilson's statement at the time the treaty was presented to the Germans on May 7, 1919, was, "If I were a German I think I should never sign it." <sup>93</sup>

Upon returning home with the treaty of Versailles and the league covenant, Wilson had blind confidence that the Senate would pass both documents. It was his belief that the League would correct the treaties shortcomings through United States leadership.

The treaty which included the covenant was defeated. Wilson's attempt to establish an illusionary dream of lasting peace never got a chance to prove itself; for, without American support, the League was doomed.

With the defeat of the treaty, Wilson's active political career was close to an end. The prophet as Arthur Walworth referred to him, had won a place in the

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

peoples heart even though his first political venture  
to many, was premature. In another day, it will pass.

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