



# A Permanent Training Policy

## By Theodore Roosevelt

**T**HE shameful unpreparedness of this nation for war is brought into constantly bolder relief every month. Nearly nine months have now gone by since the German note of January 31st last, which was a declaration of war—Congress did not declare war in April, but stated that we were already at war. Since then we have done some things well and other things very, very badly—the handling of the rifle situation, for instance, has been extremely bad. But the really vital lesson is not that there has been inexcusable blundering of a type impossible if there had been energetic and efficient action carried on with an eye single to the public good. The vital lesson for us to learn is that our blunders, shortcomings and delays are due to our failure to prepare in advance. Even the things that we are doing well ought to have been done three years ago; and it seems well nigh incredible that our people should have tolerated in their leaders the kind of sinister folly which was implied in refusing to face the truth when it stared at them in letters of flame and blood from the whole red horizon.

**M**OST emphatically I do not insist on these facts in order to hold up to obloquy the men responsible for the present condition. My sole interest is in getting our people to face the truth *in order to profit by it*. Unless they learn the truth they will not realize the necessity of guarding against a repetition in the future of the folly of which we have been guilty during the last three years; and in the future repetition of such folly might bring terrible disaster on the nation.

Consider what we have done; not what we are about to begin to get ready to do. Consider where we actually stand, what we have actually achieved, during the last nine months while Germany has been at war with us. We have started to train several hundred thousands of infantry. But we have actually trained only one division, some 20,000 men. These are the only infantry who are at present fairly ready to be pitted against our foes. For our drafted men we as yet have no modern rifles. We have started to train a large number of artillerymen; perhaps two or three hundred thousand. But we have not given them guns; for we have no heavy field guns, and are trying to utilize some of our coast guns as makeshifts, while the French are building us field artillery. As yet we have no field artillery that can be put against the foe. We have begun a shipbuilding policy after six months' criminal failure. We have begun to develop what there is reason to believe will be a first-class aviation service. But as yet we have not a single war airplane fit to send over the German lines. In other words, if now, nine months after our entry into the war, a single German army corps could operate against us, we would be wholly unable to oppose it.

**W**E have been protected during these nine months, and are now protected, only by the British fleet and the Allied armies. But for this protection we would now be lying prostrate under Germany's feet. We are able to prepare at all only because it is to the interest of England and

France to protect us. They shield our soft and helpless strength while we slowly make it ready.

These are the facts. Can any wise man study them and remain complacent? Even as regards the present war they are not pleasant reading. General Crozier, with the equanimity of the butterfly on the fence when counseling the toad under the harrow, says that our failure to build rifles means only an "endurable delay." But does it seem as "endurable" to the Allies, whose prodigious slaughter roll grows month by month? If there is any lesson which this war ought to have taught it is the priceless value of time. The delay is "endurable" for us only because the Allies purchase it for us with torrents of blood. Inasmuch as we work in leisurely safety behind barriers made of the bodies of their mangled sons; I have no doubt that we will finally develop a great fighting force. No nation has finer stuff for soldiers than America; no nation has greater wealth; probably no other nation can draw on a population of such energy, administrative capacity and inventive resourcefulness. By the time that a year since our forced entry into the war has elapsed we shall begin to become a ponderable military element; and then we shall steadily become more and more formidable; and finally, I believe, we shall become the decisive factor.

Then there will be grave danger lest our vanity mislead us into forgetfulness of our helplessness for the first year; and if so we shall again sink back into a condition of utter unpreparedness. For this reason let us refuse to be guilty of the folly of keeping silent as to the facts of the two years and a half preceding, and of the year succeeding, our entry into the war. On this matter at least it is necessary to live up to President Wilson's former desire for "pitiless publicity."

Next time we may not find allies to defend us. Let Uncle Sam prepare to defend himself. Let him realize from the experience of the immediate past that unless he prepares long in advance he will be utterly helpless if suddenly menaced with war by a great military nation. Let him never forget that our utter unpreparedness last February was such that at least a year elapsed before we were able, by the most lavish use of money, to get even half ready.

**T**HERE is but one really effective way to prepare in advance. We must make ourselves an armed democracy, a democratic nation with a democratic army. We must base universal suffrage on universal service. We must introduce the system of universal obligatory military training for all our young men. This will not represent militarism; it will represent the antidote to militarism. Such an army would be powerful for defense; and its very existence would mean that the nation would be most reluctant to engage in wanton or aggressive war; for the people who vote would be the people who fight.

Fine words will never save us from a foreign conqueror. Only deeds will save us; and then only if these deeds are done in advance.

Brag is a good dog. But Holdfast is a better one.