

KAISER'S HEIR, PRINCE OF FAILURE: The Sad Military Career of ...

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON

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KAISER'S HEIR, PRINCE OF FAILURE

The Sad Military Career of Frederick William, Who Stops Losing Battles Only Long Enough to Accept Decorations and Study the Strategic Value of Frogs

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON

FREDERICK WILLIAM, Crown Prince of Germany, was an innocent-faced, flaxen-haired child, shooting off the heads of girl dolls with toy cannon in the imperial German nursery, when a witch flew in at the window and put into his hands a blunderbuss.

"I am giving you this fine weapon," said she, "because it is so much like you. Its mouth is large; it makes a great deal of noise; its aim is uncertain; it generally fires itself when half ready, and it is more deadly in the hands of friends than when turned on foes."

With these simple words, so the story goes, she whirled away through the air and was seen no more.

How true was her estimate of the youthful Hohenzollern has been shown in the great war, for the heir of the Kaiser has invariably been on hand with military mistakes at the critical time. At least he has received the credit for the blunders whether or not he was really guiding the armies he was supposed to command. As a menace to the success of German campaigns, he has not missed a point in the game. He is known as the best friendly enemy the Allies ever had. His being ousted by Foch from the Rheims-Soissons salient is the most recent of a long series of errors which have cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of his fellow-countrymen.

"Undoubtedly this is a most stupid war," the Crown Prince said in a duly authorized interview with Dr. William Bayard Hale, when the struggle had just begun, and he has made his words come true, as far as he is concerned, in more ways than one.

Frederick William's weakness for putting on dress uniforms, so as to be ready to go into captured places at the head of his victorious troops, is one of his besetting blunders. He has the habit of not waiting until the hare is caught before making the hassenpfeffer. His first miscalculation concerns the triumphal entry of Paris, which did not happen according to schedule. But, though the Kaiser has not been able to provide any entries for him, such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon used to have, there have been plenty of telegrams of congratulation and awards of medals. It is said that on occasion the headstrong and ill-balanced heir has overruled experienced commanders, making necessary an undue haste to chide failure with medals. The first German drive toward Paris in 1914 was hardly smothered before the Crown Prince got his Iron Cross. That was soon followed by the Star of the House of Hohenzollern.

One of the most wanton wastes of life in the war was at the capture of Longwy, and later when the position was abandoned by the army of the Crown Prince. The retreat was a hideous bungle which aroused even the horror of the German Emperor. The story goes that he sent for one of the Generals and berated him for sacrificing some of the best regiments in the German Army in what could have been managed as a rear guard action with only scant loss of life.

"It was not my fault," replied the General, according to a current version. "Your brat of a son insisted upon it."

Whereupon, said the cabled account, the General saluted, turned quickly, and left the presence of majesty. While the Kaiser and the attendants were standing more or less petrified with astonishment at the boldness of these words, a shot was heard in the anteroom to which the chief had gone. He had committed suicide. None the less there appeared in the streets of Berlin not long afterward souvenir postal cards bearing photo-



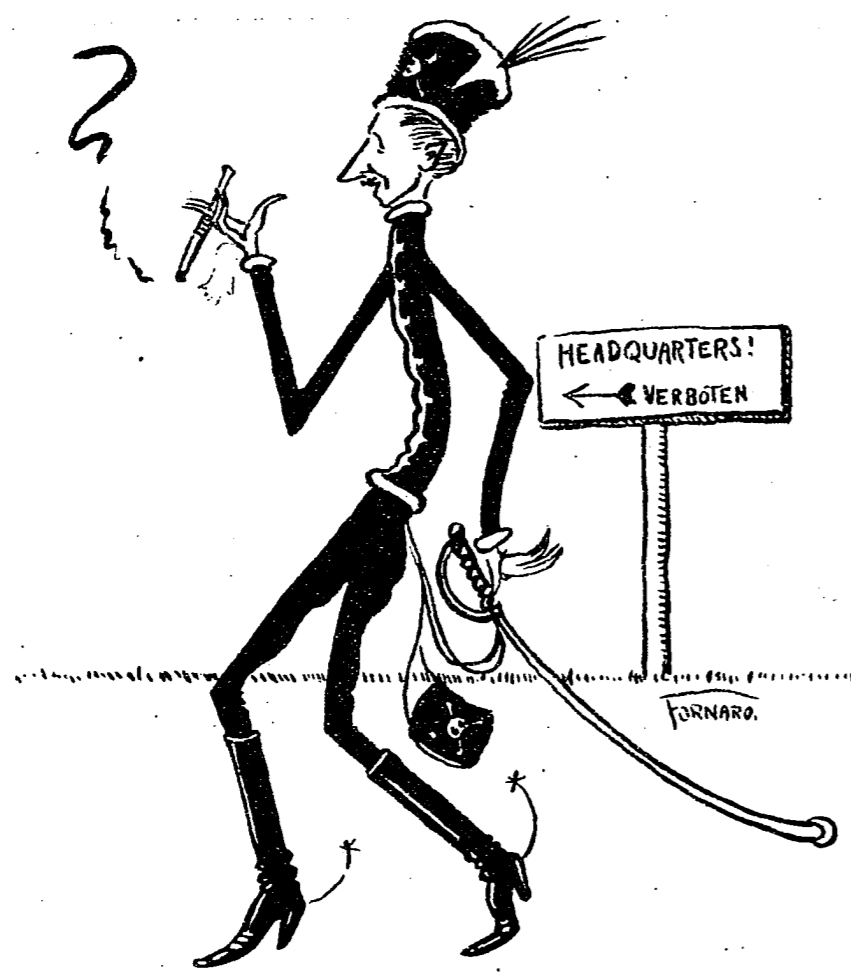
On a Super-Gun Shell—The Only Way the Crown Prince Can Ever Get to Paris.

graphs of the Crown Prince duly labeled "The Conqueror of Longwy."

It did not concern Frederick William whether such commanders as Hindenburg and Mackensen opposed the grand assault on Verdun, that ancient citadel near the French border, which was so splendidly defended. There was nothing in any of his operations in the vicinity which would have encouraged the Crown Prince, had he been a competent

leader, to proclaim "We must take Verdun." He had the grand army of assault prepared. As a leader of the war party of Germany he spread the idea far and wide that the hour of France had struck. He swayed the judgment of the Kaiser until from Potsdam came the boast that the end of the war was at hand.

The Blunderbuss of the Boche was driven back from his positions near Ver-



dun as often as seven times a week. He had no grasp of the fact that the great natural fortification, transformed from a mediaeval hold into a modern fortress, was capable of making unlimited resistance. There was not a move for months to come which did not bear the impress of stupidity on the part of whoever was in command of the German forces—and the Crown Prince is said to have been the dominant influence.

In September, 1915, came the news of the repeated failures of the Crown Prince to make any dent on the grim face of the old defense. Toward the last of that month of disaster to German arms, the right wing of the princely army was crumpled like so much paper. The whole story of Verdun is one of stupidity and brutality. The flower of the Teuton Army was hurled at impregnable outworks. More than a million lives were lost in the assault.

Berlin grew alarmed: Like the oft-predicted end of the world, the finish of the war was not yet. The Crown Prince was relieved of the command and summoned to the German General Headquarters in the Spring of 1916 and replaced by the Duke of Württemberg. Yet his Majesty was pleased to bestow upon his first born a high decoration for the ability and valor displayed in the siege of Verdun. Probably the decoration gave to the intelligent element in Germany the full realization of the failure.

There came stories that the hoodoo of the Hohenzollerns had been sent into seclusion, and the sane part of Germany began to hope once more that he would not again be giving aid and comfort to her enemies by leading armies against them. But he came back. Next he was heard of in Champagne and in other parts of Northern France. He had lost his interest in Verdun, but he was very busy.

"Fritz," to quote from a dispatch of the Kaiser to the Kaiserin, "was the first on the Aisne."

If he was, he did not stay long, for bulletins arrived before long of his flanks being hammered to pieces and of rapid retreats, and then came the official publication of high praise for the famous victory that he had won. It is estimated that the operations of the Crown Prince in 1917 cost 1,000,000 lives, and accomplished little or nothing.

The princely dress uniform was all ready that year for the pageant entitled "The Triumphal Entry into Rheims, Led by Prince Frederick William of Hohenzollern," but 60,000 German lives were the price of the folly. It became thereafter an almost daily detail to change the place of the forces of the Crown Prince on the map.

One of the most ludicrous episodes in the military career of this apostle of misfortune was his writing to the Kaiser, from the banks of the River Ailette, that he was moving heavy artillery trains unnoticed because the rumble of wheels could not be heard amid the croaking of myriads of frogs. But the frogs did not save him and his armies from a good beating. He was so harshly dealt with by the subsequent drives of the French that the Kaiser felt it necessary to make public a telegram to him and the German people. In this message the Crown Prince was again congratulated on bringing the assaults of the enemy to failure. It was necessary to collect the usual group of scapegoats to allay criticism among the people at home.

At last came the rudest shock of all, the still unfinished pinching of the princely forces by Foch's armies. The operations of the last few weeks in the Rheims-Soissons salient show the Crown Prince in his favorite rôle. Since another drive on Paris was in progress, who but Frederick William should make ready to

enter the French capital as the very centre of the moving picture of conquest? His intense jealousy of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria prevented him, apparently, from asking aid from him until too late. Rupprecht had interfered with the Crown Prince before, and, after all, he was only a Crown Prince of Bavaria and not of the imperial line.

The dispatches of the last few days have told how the frantic and belated call for four fresh divisions of the Bavarian troops did little to stem the flood of American and French forces. There were so many things which the Crown Prince

could not sense, and, anyway, this is undoubtedly a "stupid war"! Who would have thought that there were in it American soldiers who had not learned how to retreat? The onslaught of the cavalry and the tanks, the capture of the great rail base at Fère—all these were contingencies which had not been considered when the Crown Prince decided that, like Verdun, Paris must be taken. Truly the heir of the Kaiser should receive a vote of thanks at the peace table of the Allies for the many ways in which he has played into their hands.

There was much in the ante-bellum

history of the Crown Prince to indicate that he would be just the kind of a bumptious marplot he has proved to be. Numerous incidents of his vaingloriousness are on record. One of the best-known stories is revealed in James W. Gerard's book recounting the experiences of four years as Ambassador to Germany. While showing relics of Napoleon to an American woman, the Crown Prince remarked, "If father does not make war, I will." For years before the war he was putting his military blunderbuss into the faces of all comers. When the nation was under the stress of the

Zabern affair, and even the forbearing German people were growing resentful over the invasion of civil rights by the military machine, he issued a letter of congratulation to an army officer for upholding the dignity of the service by cutting down an aged cobbler with a cavalry sabre. There is no longer any doubt that more than once he forced the hands of the Kaiser, and joined with the insolent Junkers and the military caste in demanding that war be no longer delayed.

Such is the princeling to whose care the German Nation would be committed in the event of the death of the Kaiser.