

ALLIED COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

(General Max Weygand has been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies in the field. He is regarded by many as the greatest military staff officer in the world. This account of him was written by Captain Cyril Falls).

GENERAL WEYGAND had seen my car from his study window and was standing in the doorway of his delightful Chateau de Coatamou when I got out. I had just driven over from another equally charming but very different house, the white manor of Trofeunteuniou, the country home of Foch.

The two friends, the Marshal and his Chief of the Staff, had become very close summer neighbours in this remote corner of Brittany, near the little town of Morlaix, when Weygand had bought Coatamou. I was engaged upon a little biography of Foch and had just paid a visit to his widow, *la Maréchale*, at Trofeunteuniou before driving on to ask General Weygand for help and advice.

I mention this personal detail because it leads up to a remark of his which has come back very forcibly to my memory during the past few weeks. When I thanked him for his kindness, he answered:

"Whenever it is a question of the Marshal, I do what I can. I am the survivor, and I have now no other aim in life but to serve his memory."

The remark of a faithful friend, but surely also of a man who considered himself finished with the activities of life, already on the shelf! And indeed he had turned seventy, though the small, slight figure in tweed coat and flannel trousers would have passed for ten years younger. That was only a few months ago.

World's Greatest Staff Officer

On that blazing afternoon we appeared already near to war, but I do not think he had any notion that, after it had been deferred for an uneasy year, he would be called upon to take a leading part in it. This is the first important command in time of war to be held by a man who desired a command above all else and who had not prepared himself for staff work by proceeding to the School of War.

"I am not a staff officer," he said on the occasion mentioned; meaning, of course, that he did not possess the *brevet* of the School of War. He permitted himself a slight smile as he spoke; for it would have been false modesty on his part not to recognise that he was the most celebrated staff officer in the world.

I fancy that the young Belgian-born cavalryman of the early years of this century was more interested in horses and horsemanship, in steeplechasing, in the open air generally, than in any form of study which took place within four walls.

When in 1909 he became chief instructor at the Cavalry School of Saumur

it seemed that his future career was determined and that it would be mainly concerned with cavalry tactics and equitation. Yet he had a brief moment of intellectualism, when he was sent in 1913 to the Centre of Advanced Studies, a special course for Lieutenant-Colonels.

In the Last War

From that he went on to command his dragoon regiment at Nancy and found that the XX Corps of which it formed part was commanded by the already celebrated but to him unknown General Foch. Lieut.-Colonel Weygand exercised his war-time command for the month of August and no more. After the defeat of Morhange, the retreat to the Meurthe and the victory of the Montagne, he was, he told me, sitting on his horse in the Forest of Vitrimont, about to start out on a reconnaissance, when he saw the Corps Commander not far off making a typical sweeping gesture which he interpreted to mean "Dismount!"

He dismounted; and that was farewell to command, to the cavalry, and virtually to horses for the rest of the war. Henceforth he was to be Chief of Staff to Foch, as Army Commander, Army Group Commander and Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies.

At the start he had a slice of luck. Foch had been directed to pick up two Lieutenant-Colonels, Weygand and another, to act as Chief and Sub-Chief. As they drove away he asked which was the senior, and, finding that it was Weygand, declared that he should be the chief. Actually, as they found out long afterwards, the powers-that-were had intended the other man, who had been through the School of War, for the senior post.

The Peace Treaty

To speak of the work of Weygand at the side of Foch from then until 1918 would almost amount to writing an abridged history of the war. Weygand had not that spark of divine flame which glowed in Foch, but in addition to a lucid, quick-thinking mind and remarkable powers of concentration he had, and still has, a strong personality. This he subordinated entirely to his master. When, in the year 1918, he was asked for his opinion on the situation, he would give it but would add: "That is my view, but I have not yet consulted the Marshal on the subject." To the end of his association with Foch he remained standing when the Marshal brought him his papers.

The association continued after the war, with a short break in 1920 when Weygand was rushed out to Poland as chief of a military mission to assist in organising the resistance to the Russian invasion and the great counter offensive. Apart from that, Weygand remained Chief of the Staff to Foch, who was



GENERAL MAXIME WEYGAND (right), with General Sir Archibald Wavell, British Commander in the Near East

President of the Allied Military Committee of Versailles, set up to supervise the execution of the military clauses of the Treaty of that name.

In 1923 came the separation of the two men. Weygand was sent to Syria as High Commissioner to clear up a muddle of misrule and revolt. He accomplished his task and then returned to France to begin, in 1925, a period of ten years of work far from spectacular—in fact little known to the public, but in many respects as important as that of the war period. Until 1930 he was Commandant of that Centre of Advanced Studies at which he had formerly been a student. From 1931 until 1935 he was Vice-President of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, virtually Commander-in-Chief of the French Army.

And the French Army of to-day was largely made by Weygand, with finishing touches to the work put in by Gamelin. Then Weygand went into what he thought was final retirement, though not technical retirement, because as a signal honour he was retained on the active list for life.

Among his many other honours was his election to the French Academy. Some other distinguished soldiers have reached this assembly of "Immortals" without bringing with them any considerable "literary baggage," but he happens to be an admirable writer.

In person the general is short, slight, and dapper, with the carriage of a horseman and the inscrutable face of

an Oriental. He has many English friends, though he does not speak or even read our tongue.

Easy and friendly in his manner, one can scarcely imagine him ruffled, though I am told that during the last war he could be pretty sharp if he thought that the occasion warranted it.

The Old Battlefields

Names of towns which appeared daily in the cable messages from 1914 to 1918 are again in the news as the German tanks overrun Northern France. Many of them are familiar to men of the 1st New Zealand Expeditionary Force. In his thrust down the valley of the Somme River to the coast, the enemy is recrossing the old battlefields, some of them not yet recovered from the last war. Once again the guns are within striking distance of Rheims, whose magnificent cathedral was irreparably damaged by German shellfire in the Great War. The reconstruction was completed only a short time ago. St. Quentin, round which fierce battles raged in 1914-18, is an important railway junction for three main lines; Laon is a still more important junction, with four main lines running to various parts of the country. By occupying these key towns the enemy gains a great advantage, as he dislocates rail traffic and disorganises the deployment of troops to the various fields of action. At the time of writing the intense drive is down the valley of the Somme with the idea of cutting off the armies still fighting in Belgium and the extreme north of France, and dividing the main French and British forces.