

Modern european history and politics: american infantrymen win world war i essay ...

[Media](#), [Interview](#)



Source Criticism

Source Criticism: " American Infantrymen Win World War I"

In 1918 at the end of World War I (WWI) the American journalist, George Seldes, with three other American journalists, interviewed the German General and Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg. The interview may have been the most important interview of WWI but ironically, none of the major newspapers ran the story. This was an incredibly important interview because Hindenburg had been the Army Chief of Staff starting on August 29, 1916. After Hindenburg was appointed to that position he appointed Erich Ludendorff to be his Quartermaster General. Hindenburg and Ludendorff organized a new arm for the German Justice Department, the Third Supreme Council. In reality the Third Supreme Council was " a military-industrial dictatorship that held virtually total power until September 29, 1918 when, with defeat inevitable, power was returned to the Reichstag." If the interview of Field Marshall Hindenburg by four American journalists on September 29th, 1918 had not been suppressed, it is possible that World War II (WWII) could have been avoided.

September 29th is still celebrated as Armistice Day. On that day in 1918 George Seldes was working as a foreign war correspondent submitting his articles to a press syndicate, the Marshall Syndicate which had offices in France. The opportunity to interview Hindenburg was created by four journalists who were discussing the end of the war on Armistice Day. Seldes, Herbert Corey (Marshall Syndicate), Lincoln Eyre (NY World) and Cal Lyon (United Press) were concerned because in all the wild celebrations over the end of the war, the dead and the suffering seemed to have been forgotten.

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The made a pact with each other to devote the rest of their lives to making sure a war like WWI never happened again. Since they were journalists this meant finding and reporting as many facts about the war as possible. They decided to interview the German officers who had lost the war. During the war journalists were held accountable to military rules but since the war was over the journalists felt they were no longer bound to the same rules. " We four also decided that day that military discipline no longer applied to newspaper correspondents, and that we could break the Armistice regulations, drive into Germany, see for ourselves what was really going on there, and attempt to interview Field Marshall Hindenburg."

The journalists had some difficulties traveling to Kassel where Hindenburg was stationed but they eventually arrived. Hindenburg turned down their request for an interview. Fortunately Headquarters in Germany ordered Hindenburg to grant an interview. Before the Hindenburg interview Seldes had not seen the papers from the United States (U. S.). The American newspapers in France published by the Entente Press only reported the successes by the European forces from Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom, and France. Seldes mentions that fact in his interview indicating that he might have asked different questions if he knew what the headlines were saying in the American newspapers at home. In the U. S. the verdict was out - America had won the war.

Field Marshall Hindenburg welcomed them " in a kindly smiling voice, shaking hands for the first time since the war with men in the uniform of his enemies." He immediately explained, " I will answer any military questions. I am a soldier. But I refuse to answer any political questions." He shrugged his

shoulders. " I am a soldier." Soon the most important question of the interview was asked and answered.

Who won the war?

I will reply with the same frankness. The American infantry in the Argonne won the war. To begin with I must confess that Germany could not have won the war - that is after 1917. We might have won on land. We might have taken Paris. But after the failure of the world food crops of 1917 the British blockade reached its greatest effectiveness in 1917. So I must really say that the British food blockade and the American blow in the Argonne of 1918 decided the war for the Allies. . . . German and America divisions fought each other to a standstill in the Argonne. They met and shattered each other's strength. The Americans are splendid soldiers. But when I replaced a division it was weak in numbers and unrested, while each American division came in fresh and fit and on the offensive. The day came when the American command sent new divisions into the battle and when I had not even a broken division to plug up the gaps. There was nothing left to do but ask terms.

Seldes reported how the ending of the interview was extremely emotional. " Hindenburg bowed his head and tears flooded his pale, watery eyes. His huge bulk was shaken. He wept for his " poor fatherland."

After the war Germans organized new political parties against the " old the monarchists and the militarists" in a vicious fight for power. The old political crowd were blaming civilians for the loss; " the old monarchists and the old militarists were spreading the myth that the war was lost not by Wilhelm's

armies but by the republican Dolschstoss – the civilian ‘stab in the back’.” Seldes explained that “Ludendorff originated the Dolschstosslegende and Hitler armed it. The ‘stab in the back’ reason the German’s lost WWI has become the popularly accepted version. If the truth had been made available to the Germans as well as to the rest of the people on the planet, it is possible that World War II may not have taken place but the German people became resentful and unhappy. Germans started to be distrustful of politicians and other community members blaming the German military loss on back stabbing by civilians, Socialists, Communists, and Jews. People in these groups were eventually labeled as the ‘November’ Criminals by Hitler.

The decisive battle of WWI took place in Argonne, France. No American or Allied soldiers were in Germany to force surrender. “For many Germans the armistice had come out of the blue; their leaders had assured them for years that victory was inevitable – until November 1918, when these same leaders told them to accept a settlement dictated by the enemies.” The German people were confused and unsure of the reasons for the defeat. The majority were very comfortable with the ‘stab in the back’ scenario because that would explain so many unexplained problems with the vague reasons given to them for the loss of the war. Even Hindenburg remained silent during the disinformation campaign.

One of the most important reports from journalists at the end of the World War I was never published in mainstream newspapers. The journalists who gained an interview from Field Marshal Hindenburg on Armistice Day, 1918 were not congratulated, instead they were arrested. The thesis “If the

interview of Field Marshall Hindenburg by four American journalists on September 29th, 1918 had not been suppressed, it is possible that World War II (WWII) could have been avoided” does seem to be a reasonable assumption. The strongest argument agreeing with the thesis is from Seldes.

What makes this interview historic news of world importance, and not merely an American story, is the admission (by Hindenburg) that the war was won fairly in the field – no excuses no blaming starvation (the British blockade), or betrayal at home (the Ludendorff myth).

The most unfortunate consequence of the story’s suppression was the rise of the ‘stab-in-the-back’ excuse which Hitler embraced and used to make Germans feel so resentful they engaged in terrible war crimes during WWII. Seldes, the journalist who asked Hindenburg the question ‘Who won the war?’ has suggested that WWII would never had been fought had Hindenburg and others told the truth about the loss of WWI. Instead they were good soldiers even after WWI was lost; they acted on the instructions of their political bosses, the old monarchist and the old militarists.

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APPENDIX