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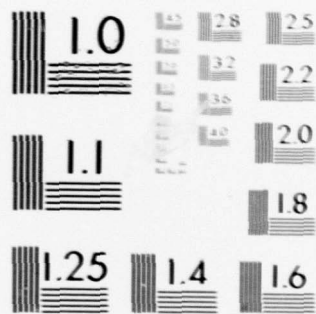
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FOREWORD

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THE WISDOM OF HOMER LEA

by

William V. Kennedy

Seventy years after he described to the American public the successful Japanese campaign that would take place in the Philippines in World War II, and 67 years after he described with equal accuracy a series of world conflicts and the demise of the British Empire, the work of what may well have been our only military genius to date has been nearly forgotten. Worse, the only discussion of his work in recent years has been by a popular writer intent on ridiculing the notion that the primary national interests of the United States may be shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

That the work of Homer Lea has survived at all is largely due to Clare Booth Luce, the actress wife of the late Henry Luce, chief of the Time-Life publishing empire.

Astonished by the fact that a book first published in 1909 could have predicted the Japanese attack on the Philippines--even to identity of the landing areas--Mrs. Luce arranged for the republication of Lea's books, The Valor of Ignorance and The Day of the Saxon. The first dealt with the inadequate state of US defenses. The second dealt with the dangers facing the British Empire.

Much, of course, of what Lea wrote in those two volumes is dated and some of it, such as the suggestion of racial superiority in The Day of the Saxon, is a product of the prejudices of the time and environment in which Lea lived. If

the books are re-read with care, however, much of what appears therein has a startling immediacy. Indeed, there is substantial reason to believe that what Lea saw worth preserving in the British Empire was the beginning of a world order. Witness the following: "Primitive patriotism is local and to be of use in this age must, like the evolution of a race, pass through a corresponding transmutation. The small patriotism of environment must now be put aside forever. This is not a crucifixion of old ideals, it is a transfiguration. It is the merging of localities into universality. It is turning the eyes of an empire from the hopeless, stunted herbage at their feet to the constellations overhead, where once not many centuries ago some shepherds raised their narrowed eyes and found a universe."

As so much of what Lea wrote portended future events, so these words seem to have forecasted the attempts at a system of world order that would follow the two world wars, in the form of the League of Nations and the United Nations.

Homer Lea wrote in the tradition of Clausewitz and Mahan. He believed that there were "immutable laws" governing international behavior that could be deduced from a careful study of history. He was meticulous in gathering and using statistics, but in the ultimate he relied on informed judgment.

The obscurity into which Lea's work has fallen in recent years probably has much to do with rejection of the historical approach by those who dominated US military policy during the period that culminated in the Vietnam disaster. Alain Enthoven, one of the most prominent of those administrators, sought to dismiss the work of Lea and others with one word, "colorful." If the "quantifiable" policies exemplified by Enthoven and others had ended in success rather than failure, Lea and the tradition of military thought he represents might well have been permanently relegated to obscurity.

The circumstances in which the United States has found itself during the past decade suggest that something has gone terribly wrong. Since Lea so

accurately predicted the outcome of earlier military policies, we might still have something to learn from him.

Lea acquired his practical knowledge of military affairs under great disability. Crippled from birth, afflicted with a worsening curvature of the spine, destined to die blind at the age of 35, Lea yet managed to achieve his ambition to be a soldier. He did this by linking up with Chinese revolutionaries during his student days at Stanford. Commissioned by one means or another as a "lieutenant general in the Army of the Emperor Kwang Hsu" and later of the Chinese Republic, Lea topped off a remarkable journey through the Pacific and China by becoming involved in early Chinese revolutionary actions against the Manchu Dynasty.

Pursued to Hong Kong by the agents of the regime, Lea became "Chief of Staff" to none other than Sun Yat Sen.

"Who was that little hunchback?," Sun asked after his first encounter with Lea. "That," answered one of his associates, "is Homer Lea, one of the most brilliant--perhaps the most brilliant military genius now alive." This was in 1900 when Lea was 24.

Lea fled with Sun to Japan and there acquired the knowledge of Japanese political and military aims that he was to set forth in The Valor of Ignorance. Later, he provided a refuge in California to Dr. Sun and an assemblage of dissident Chinese officials and aristocrats that must have been the wonder of the neighborhood. He instructed aspiring Chinese revolutionary soldiers on the front porch and, after publication of The Valor of Ignorance, found himself reviewing the German Army at the invitation of the Kaiser.

"This nation," Lea would write of Germany, "has forgotten God in its exaltation of the Germanic race."

The Day of the Saxon derived from the visit to Germany and a stay in Britain at the invitation of Field Marshal Lord Roberts who was engaged in the thankless task Winston Churchill would assume 20 years later of warning Britain of "the gathering storm."

In company with Dr. Sun, Lea returned to China in 1911 finishing The Day of the Saxon on the journey. He participated in the Chinese Revolution, leading a Chinese column to Nanking where he saw Sun installed as the first President of China. Lea suffered a stroke in China. He died in California in November 1912, leaving unfinished a third book of strategy to have been entitled The Swarming of the Slav.

How much of Lea's work applies to the present?

Most striking, and in some ways ominous, is Lea's assessment of the strategic problems of the British Empire, for what he describes as the "encompassing" strategic relationship of that empire to the central position of the German and Russian empires matches the present strategic relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union.

"Whenever one nation," Lea wrote, ". . . is circumscribed and limited by another nation, and at the same time possesses equal or greater physical power, then the encompassing nation is destroyed, since a state of equal or greater military power occupying interior lines is as many times stronger as there are political segments in the circumscribed circle."

In short, Lea was saying that only by destroying the military power and seat of the continental government could the British Empire overcome the German or the Russian whereas a continental victory over British power in the Pacific, in India or in Europe would destroy the British Empire.

Long before oil became a factor in the strategic equation, Lea saw Persia (Iran) and Afghanistan as keys to global supermacy. Lea quoted Czar Peter the

Great: "No occasion should be lost to provoke war with Persia, to hasten its decay and to advance to the Persian Gulf."

If control of oil production at the source, and of the sea lanes across the Indian Ocean are added to the geographic advantages Czar Peter sought, it can scarcely be said that the importance of those aims has diminished.

As to the degree of ruthlessness Russia would exert to achieve its goals, Lea wrote, "Russia in her progress is concerned no more with the devastation of her wars than is Russian nature with the havoc of her winters. In the eighteenth century this empire sent into her wars 4,910,000 troops; casualties of which were 1,380,000. In the nineteenth century the number of troops engaged was 4,900,000; the casualties, 1,140,000."

Lea linked the Russian capacity to absorb such losses--proportional to Soviet losses in World War II--to the rapid increase in the Russian population during the 18th and 19th centuries. Now, of course, there is a new factor: the Russian birth rate is declining. Whereas Lea described the Russian advances of those two centuries as "glacial," the Soviets are no longer in a position to take their time.

Another factor related to the declining Russian birth rate: "An empire made up of heterogeneous racial elements can only endure so long as the military power and governmental direction remain in the hands of a homogeneous people." That already is one of the bad dreams that bother the Soviet leadership. They speak of it as the "yellowing" of the Soviet Union as the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet empire head toward ascendancy.

As concerns the real nightmare of current Soviet policy, Lea wrote, "The expansion of China is antagonistic to Russia more than to any other nation."

Some of the other current strategic topics to which Lea's work seems to have some relation are as follows:

"Europe First (and only?) Strategy"

"The complexity of modern international relationships is such that it demands the simultaneous defense of two or more frontiers."

* * *

"In the Pacific, scorned or denied by ignorance, broods a new peril in a kind of sullen gentleness not unlike the typhoon that, also, in these purple solitudes awaits those who forget."

* * *

"We have called attention to a strange fatality that from time to time seizes hold upon all nations, and in numerous instances is the indirect cause that leads to their final dissolution. This characteristic is concentrating the entire attention of the nation against one enemy while the movement against its other frontiers by an equally dangerous foe remains unchecked."

* * *

"First Strike"

"When the rate of speed by which nations move to the point of contact has been ascertained, it devolves upon the ministers of state to anticipate any overt act on the part of the enemy and initiate the war."

Lea counted 10 cases out of 111 in the 18th and 19th centuries in which war was formally declared before hostilities started, with the ratio of undeclared wars increasing as time went on. He concluded, "In the future it can be considered as an established principle that nations will more and more make war without previous notification, since modern facilities increase their ability to take their opponents by surprise and to strike the first blow as nearly as possible to their main base."

* * *

Diplomacy

"Statesmen defend and lose greater interests than soldiers, and it is more generally upon their wisdom or ignorance that national greatness or survival depends."

* * *

Defense of Japan

"The security of an insular empire is determined, not by the defense of its own shores, but by the control of the coasts encompassing the sea in which it is situated.

"Sea power in an insular empire is not measured by the number of its ships of war, but by its capacity to prevent the maritime superiority of any state placed on the external shores of the sea in which it is located. This capacity is primarily inherent not in naval but in military land power.

"Whenever a continental state abuts upon the sea in which is situated an insular kingdom, and acquires a relative equality in maritime power, the probabilities of eventual victory rest entirely with the continental nation."

* * *

Australia

"Each day the world grows smaller; each day mankind is being more crowded and jostled together. In this universal pressure all is in a state of flux--man and his habitat. Because of this, decadent and minor states must gravitate with increasing momentum toward the larger and more powerful nations. Because of this Australasia is dragging closer and closer to the shores of Asia. Yet it is not war that is doing this; it is peace; not the conquests of kings, but the hungers of their subjects; not man in his elementary character of marauder, but man in his highest civilization, in his ten thousand new necessities--his speech across the waters, his flight across the seas."

* * *

The Need to Study History

"Man should be as old as recorded time, yet he remains, whenever his vanity intervenes, as young as his own years."

* * *

"It is customary for nations in their own time to deny the application of natural forces to their own activities. They believe that the human race moves forward in a straight line, instead of in widening cycles, and that they have reached a point where all that is past cannot affect them since they have created new conditions to which old laws are not applicable. This assumption only exemplifies the delusive character of the knowledge they pretend to possess. Throughout all ages mankind has believed in this same directness of his progress: that the human race would not again come upon its own spoor. Yet we have not found a single instance in modern times, either in the creation or extinction of political entities, that differs in fundamental principles from those of ancient eras."

* * *

Control of the Sea

"The importance of sea control to military enterprise is only as a safe means of communication between theaters of war separated by oceanic space. The value of the mastery of these lines is determined, not on account of the lines, per se, but the worth of the territories at both ends and the degree of power exercised over these lands by the possession of their sea-lines of communication."

* * *

The Role of Technology

"In no instance is the falsity of national policy deductions more pronounced than in ideas concerning the mechanical means of war and the undue preeminence they give to them. Only when these means are restricted to one combatant do they affect the outcome of war."

* * *

"With every new military invention man is inspired with the belief that war is at an end. Yet each succeeding decade betrays the illusion of such futile hopes."

* * *

The Vanity of Nations

"A nation is never more vain of its strength than on the eve of destruction."

* * *

These excerpts of Lea's thoughts are by no means the totality of what he left behind. They do suggest, however, that the legacy of Homer Lea deserves a more permanent place in the formal education of our officers and statesmen than it has been accorded to date.

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| 20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This occasional paper considers some of the writings of Homer Lea, a military strategist of the early 1900's, in the contemporary timeframe. | | |