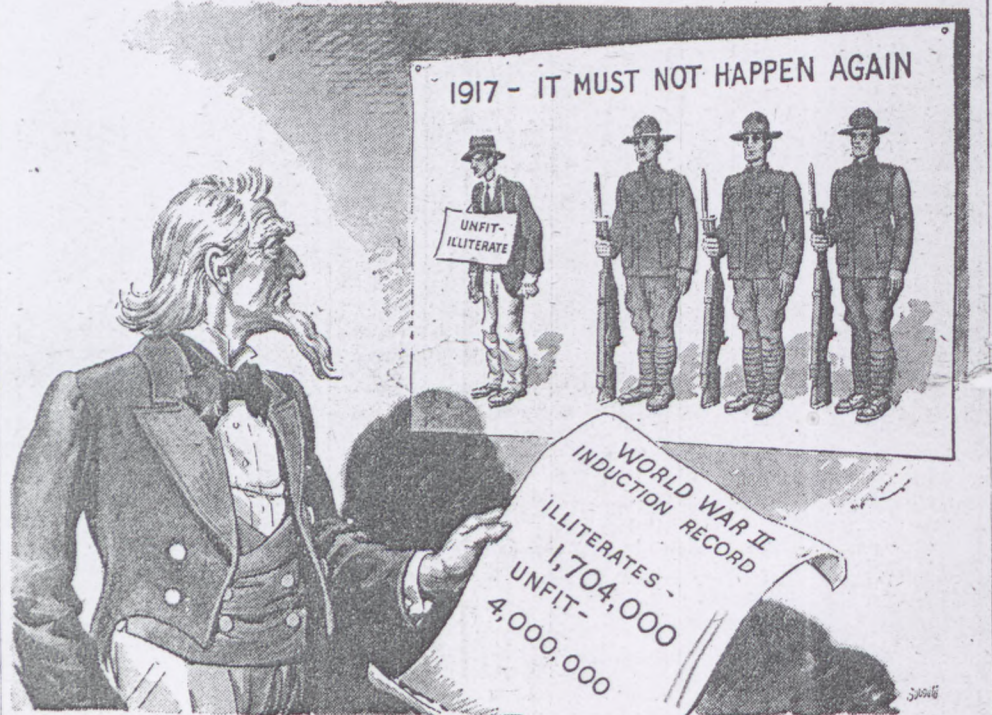


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## The Unlearned Lesson of World War I



By Belmont Farley,

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Although the Nation depends at all times for social stability and economic security upon the loyalty and ability of its citizens, there is no time in a country's history when its very survival so obviously rests upon the sound health, the technical skills and practical knowledge of its people as it does in the midst of a war. War submits human as well as material resources to a strict accounting, and compels attention to human deficits which only a peculiar brand of shortsightedness could fail to recognize.

The American people were afflicted with more than a light touch of this brand of myopia after World War No. 1, when the physical and mental inadequacies of large numbers of men in uniform called forth little more action than the writing of some good news stories. In 1917-18, for the first time in history, fighting men were given psychological and educational examinations. One-fourth of the men who wore the uniform were unable to read a newspaper intelligently or write a legible letter home. Twenty-nine per cent of the men in the draft were rejected for physical unfitness. These facts so impressed the American Legion that one of the first steps taken by that body after its organization was in the direction of eliminating illiteracy. The Legion also advocated a sound health and recreation program for American youth.

### High School Rolls Trebled.

Educators joined the veterans in these programs and began systematic, nationwide study of the causes of educational and physical inadequacies in American youth. It would not be correct to say that the results of the efforts of educators, veterans and others interested in a physically and intellectually strong citizenry resulted in exactly zero. There were some accomplishments. High school enrollment in the United States between 1920 and 1940 increased from 2,200,389 to 6,601,444. Physical and health education were recognized as more than frills.

But the ultimate effect of these improvements can be judged by the extent to which they became available to all youth, since war makes a universal draft upon manpower. A look at the

The alarming situation at that date will be appreciated from the general's recital of specific shortages of needed skills. "Actually," he said, "out of every 300,000 men inducted, we needed 4,689 with training as radio operators. We were getting 135. We were short 4,554.

"Out of every 300,000 men inducted the Army needed 4,501 with training as medical technicians. We were getting 166, a shortage of 4,335. We needed 4,372 telephone and telegraph linemen. We were getting 343, a shortage of 4,029. We needed 1,562 master mechanics. We were getting 14, a shortage of 1,548.

"In the entire field of automotive mechanics, which includes many allied subjects, out of every 300,000 men inducted, we were short 10,437. That means a shortage of 34,790 out of every 1,000,000 men. In an army of 4,000,000 men, that's a shortage of 139,160 automotive mechanics.

"Taking only those specialties in which the Army has found major shortages, we find a total of 62,853 lacking in every 300,000 men inducted. That adds up to 838,040 in an army of 4,000,000 men.

"Yes, these shortages of trained manpower—of men trained in the fundamentals of jobs that must be done in a modern army—are serious, much too serious. The specialist field is being combed and recombined. The supply of trained men is dwindling by the day."

### 10,000,000 Trained.

The shortages of trained men and women were as great in war industry as they were in the armed forces. The story of the emergency training of specialized personnel in both industry and the Army is an inspiring story of American ingenuity and determination. The American schools on day and night shifts have trained more than 10,000,000 workers in skills needed by the war industries. Schools and colleges are co-operating with the Army and Navy in a variety of specialized training programs that dotted with uniforms campuses from coast to coast.

The story turned out to be an inspiring one, however, only because there were Allies to hold off our enemies until the training job was done. There is no doubt about the prewar weakness of our national defense in terms of ships

educational program in terms of its contribution to national security in World War No. 2 as they did in World War No. 1. They hope to make education more nearly meet the needs of peace as well as of defense. They are analyzing weaknesses and seeking to eliminate them. Once again they come before the American people asking for the improvement of existing school services and the extension of educational opportunity on some comparable basis to all American children and youth. There is every indication that the returning veterans of the present war will co-operate in this program as the veterans of 1918 co-operated in plans to improve schools following their demobilization.

In their proposal for adopting education to the present-day needs of individuals and of the national life, educators are receiving plenty of advice. Critics of education, friendly and otherwise, offer scores of suggestions. This is as it should be. Schools of democracy are nobody's monopoly. Like Government, the schools must remain in the hands of the people if the people are to be sovereign. It is commendable and desirable for citizens to offer suggestions for the improvement of education; but many of the suggestions are offered with the nonchalance of a patron suggesting a change in the time schedule of trains on an established railroad. In hundreds of American communities the schools haven't even a roadbed. They aren't going any place until some fundamental work is done. Advice on whether there should be less mathematics or more mathematics, more history or less history, more vocational or less vocational study in those communities is not as pertinent as advice that there should be a school staffed by professionally trained teachers and equipped with books and other tools of learning which will permit the teaching of anything effectively.

### Schools Vary Widely.

The degree to which the American schools have been so staffed and equipped varies tremendously throughout the Nation. America has some of the finest and some of the poorest schools that can be found anywhere in the world. This needless inequality of

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But the ultimate effect of these improvements can be judged by the extent to which they became available to all youth, since war makes a universal draft upon manpower. A look at the census figures of 1940 throws some light upon what the postwar resolutions of 1919-20 to improve educational opportunity accomplished. In 1940, there were 10 States in which one-fifth or more of the population over 25 years of age had not gone to school past the fourth grade. In one of these States 36 per cent of the adult population had only a fourth-grade education or less.

It is quite evident that while, in some parts of the United States, the increase between 1920-1940 in the number of those who were going to high school had boosted the enrollment in that institution on a Nation-wide basis by 200 per cent, there were other large areas in which a substantial percentage of youth never got half way through the grade schools.

#### Results of Slow Motion.

The selective service for World War No. 2 was scarcely under way when the result of 25 years of slow motion in educational development began to show. Lack of education is a much more serious handicap to the soldier in today's Army than it was to his father in 1917-18. This war is a mechanical and scientific war to a degree that will never be fully realized by civilians until peace removes the security blackouts from wartime laboratories, experimental fields and the battle fronts themselves.

It must be recognized that the schools and colleges deserve great credit for the backlog of technical education which furnished so much of the technical leadership which this war demands. Some idea of the handicap of educational inadequacy to the prosecution of this war can be gained, however, from the straight-from-the-shoulder comments on it by Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, commanding general, Services of Supply, the War Department, to a group of educators especially assembled in Washington in August, 1942, to appraise the Nation's educational preparation for this war.

"Our Army today," said Gen. Somervell, "is an Army of specialists. Out of every 100 men inducted into the service, 63 are assigned to duties requiring specialized training. We aren't getting those 63 specialists through the induction centers. But modern mechanized warfare dictates that we must have them.

"Yes, we must have these specialists—these men who know the fundamentals of electricity, who know automotive mechanics, who can operate radios, or dismantle carburetors. Without them, your Army would be an incongruous mass, incapable of attaining any objective."

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The story turned out to be an inspiring one, however, only because there were Allies to hold off our enemies until the training job was done. There is no doubt about the prewar weakness of our national defense in terms of ships and bases and well-trained military forces. The educational inadequacy of millions of citizens to fulfill the wartime duties of citizenship was an even more serious weakness in our national defense.

The inadequacy was recognized in pre-Pearl Harbor days. In an important engineering camp examination was given to recruits from the prewar draft in 1941 which disclosed that 76 per cent of the Negro troops and 11 per cent of the white troops were practically illiterate—an insuperable handicap in a service where blueprints and printed directions were basic aides for installation and use of some of the most complicated machinery of war.

#### 5,704,000 Rejected.

As a result of this disclosure and similar ones in other centers, the military authorities asked the Selective Service System to reject all men who had not completed the fourth grade in school, a standard arbitrarily adopted as that of functional literacy. By midsummer of 1942, a total of 200,000 men had been turned down for this reason alone. Alarmed at the loss of a number of men equivalent to nearly 15 divisions, and stung by sharp charges of "discrimination," military authorities decided to accept 5 per cent of those selectees who fell below the standard of fourth-grade achievement, and operate schools in the Army camps to eliminate illiteracy. Later the percentage was raised, and in many camps today, officers and enlisted men who should be teaching men how to shoot guns out of tanks and drop bombs on their targets, instead, in some quiet barracks, are toiling with men who are learning the ABCs.

A total of 1,704,000 man registrants in the selective service up to February 1 had failed to meet the minimum mental and educational standards for induction into the armed forces—350,000 of them signing their names with a mark! Nearly 4,000,000 men had been rejected up to the same date because of physical unfitness. The rejections for educational and physical inadequacy could man the whole western front—and many to spare. In short, we have lost more men in World War No. 2 because of educational and physical deficiency than we had under arms in World War No. 1.

Much of this educational and physical unfitness could have been prevented if the schools of this country had between 1920 and 1940 offered all youth an adequate educational program, which included health and physical education.

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#### Schools Vary Widely.

The degree to which the American schools have been so staffed and equipped varies tremendously throughout the Nation. America has some of the finest and some of the poorest schools that can be found anywhere in the world. This needless inequality of opportunity for American children is hard to justify in peace when the rights and duties of citizenship are passed out on equal terms to all alike. It is still harder to justify in time of war when the long arm of the Federal Government reaches into the most remote corners of the Nation and summons youth to personal participation in the defense of their country.

The result of such a policy of inequality of opportunity is easily seen in the unequal degree to which youth were able to answer that summons. A survey of selective service rejections for mental and educational deficiency shows that all States contributed to them, but by no means in the same proportion. In Oregon and Utah, for instance, only 1 per cent out of every 100 registrants was rejected for educational inadequacy. In Alabama and South Carolina nearly 13 out of every 100 registrants were rejected for that reason. Rejections in the other States trail between these two extremes. It certainly is no accident that 13 of the 15 States with the highest proportion of rejections occupy bottom rank in annual per-pupil expenditures for their schools.

The first problem to solve in the maintenance and improvement of schools, either urban or rural, is the problem of financial support. Urban communities and States which include large metropolitan areas have gone much further toward the solution of this problem than have States composed largely of farm populations, but the variation in the support of school systems within some of the so-called urban States is almost as great as the variations in support between urban and rural States. There are 115,000 school systems in the United States as a whole. Some school systems spend \$6,000 a year per classroom unit. Other school systems spend less than \$100 per classroom unit per year. The wealthiest State naturally includes some of the classrooms supported at the rate of \$6,000 a year. It also includes a few classroom units supported at less than \$750 a year.

It is clear that the equalization of educational opportunity is partly to be accomplished by the several States and within the several States. Programs toward equalization within the States have, however, been under way for many years. Great progress has been made.

Very little progress has been made, however, in the equalization of educational opportunity between the States. The amount spent for a classroom unit on a Nation-wide average is about \$1,600.