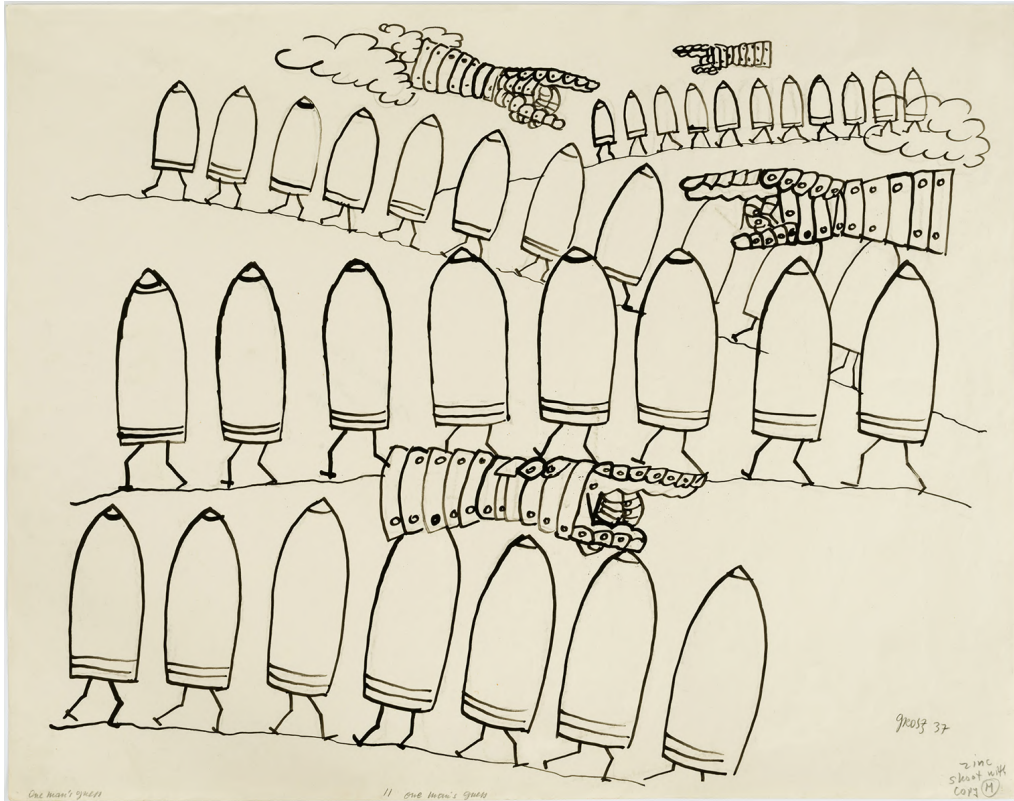


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George GROSZ (1893 - 1959)

ONE MAN'S GUESS

Brush and reed pen over light grey chalk on paper

18 ³/₁₆ x 23 ⁹/₁₆ in. (46,2 x 59,9 cm)

1937

Signed and dated lower-right „Grosz 37” and inscribed "11 one man's guess" bottom-center and "one man's guess" bottom-left.

Stamped on the reverse "GEORGE GROSZ NACHLASS" and numbered 4-103-8

PROVENANCE

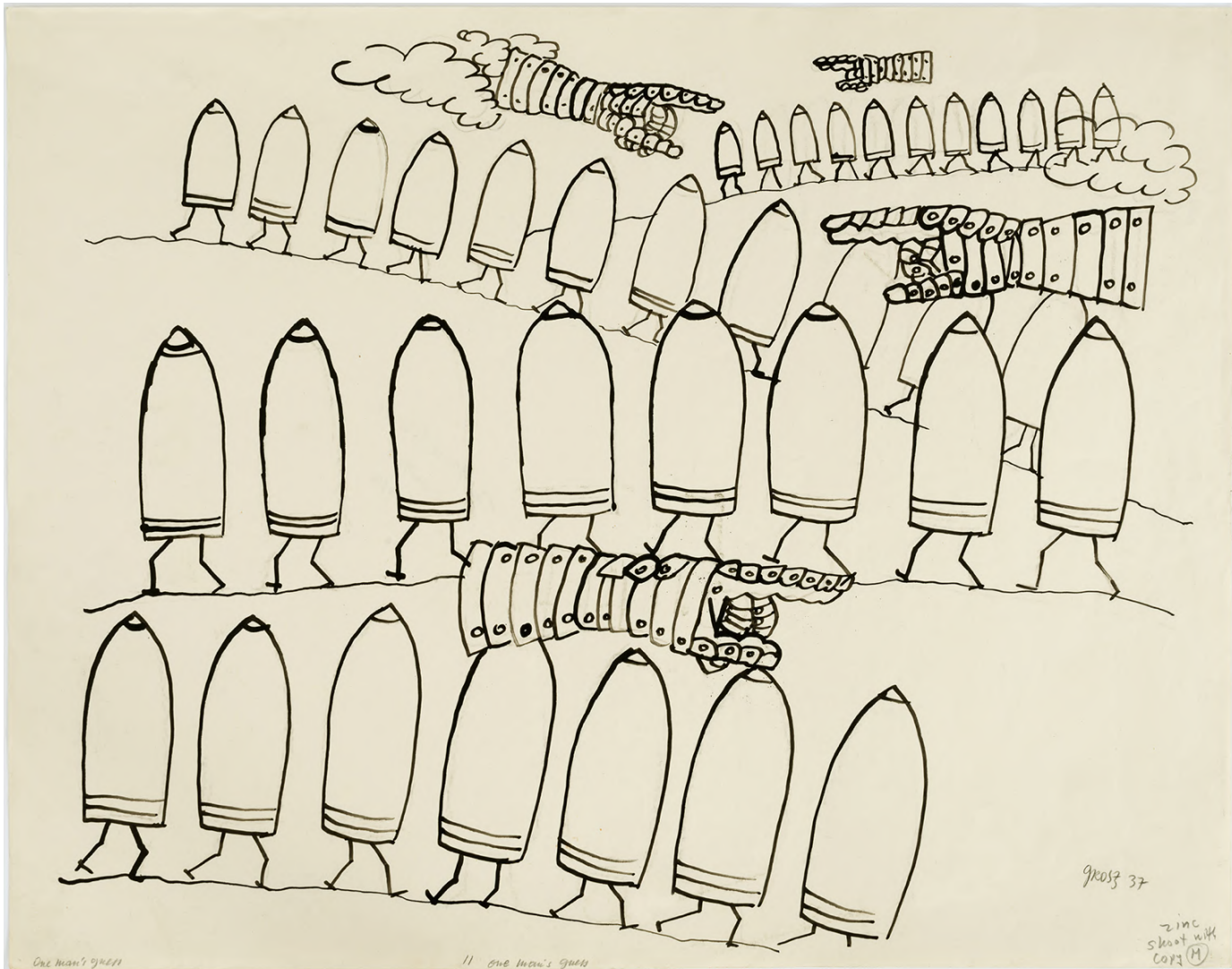
The Estate of George Grosz

LITERATURE

Lynn Montross, "One Man's Guess," Esquire Magazine, September 1937, p. 69 (unpublished drawing)

AUTHENTICATION

This work will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of works on paper by George Grosz in preparation by Ralph Jentsch, managing director of the George Grosz Estate.



Esquire

• THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

SEPTEMBER
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One Man's Guess

Prophecies of wholesale destruction sound silly when you think how long our civilization has muddled through

by LYNN MONTROSS

• ARTICLE •

IT is now the open season for prophecy, and we may soon expect a revival of the ancient favorite showing how easily New York could be captured. You know the one. Ten thousand enemies of a vaguely Hunnish or Oriental origin are to be smuggled into the Bronx in cleverly camouflaged banana crates; they will promptly seize the keys to the country and reduce us to serfs in no time at all. It screens well, that old number, especially in those scenes dealing with the fate of women in war.

Or, if you prefer, there is a more snappy and up-to-date version. Instead of traveling in banana crates our mysterious enemies descend from parachutes this time. But their professional visit scarcely seems worth the bother, since the country has already been reduced to corpses and ashes by bombs more terrible than anything yet imagined. The whole thing will have taken place since last Wednesday noon, of course, without a preliminary declaration of war. Before half-past three, in fact, all of our main industrial centers will have been destroyed.

At first glance this calamity seems more frightful even than the banana crate invasion; but there is one sombre consolation—our women, having all been gassed to death at the outset, won't have to suffer a fate worse than death. Indeed, after thinking it over, one begins to question the mental age of foes so lacking in vision as to blow up the whole works. . . . What profit glory!

In all versions it is customary for the seer to quote exalted even if somewhat recondite authorities. Usually he has just been chatting with "a well-informed European diplomatist whose name, for obvious reasons, cannot be revealed." Or perhaps he has recently had a tête-à-tête with "a high-ranking European staff officer whose name, for ob-

vious reasons, cannot be revealed." The reader can only infer that the diplomatist or staff officer would catch hell if the boss discovered that he had let out military secrets of such importance.

For it is one of the oddities of human nature that the most absurd nonsense about the next war will be swallowed whole at a time when the sanest pacifists are meeting with ridicule. Any writer suggesting a bare possibility of permanent world peace would be awarded a rousing Bronx cheer; yet only let him foretell the complete destruction of civilization come next November and the erstwhile cynics will listen with awed respect.

Incidentally the one about the destruction of civilization, with all Europe a heap of smoking ruins, might be called the Old Faithful of next-war auguries. You may count on seeing it spout periodically from now until the outbreak of a new conflict. In fact, there is only one thing on earth more persistent—and that is a civilization (such as it is) which has managed to muddle through somehow since the decline of the Roman Empire.

The latest novelty in next-war forecasts is a charming portrait of future strategy in which opposing military forces will no longer be so old-fashioned as to fight each other. Instead it seems that they will apply themselves to the wholesale slaughter of enemy civilians, particularly women and children.

The usual talkative but anonymous ambassadors, soldiers and war ministers are quoted as authorities; the usual predictions are made as to improved killing-tools which will put previous weapons into the class of mild rebukes.

Or is there anything new in this preview? Allowing for changes in tactics and weapons, the theme has always followed essentially the same pattern. . . . The last war, as every school-child

knows, was a dull and stupid affair wearily decided in the end by famine, fear and exhaustion plus the incredible blunders of generals or statesmen. But watch out for the coming war! Then history will no longer repeat itself: the generals will prove both talented and terrible; the tactics will be frightfully swift and cruel; the weapons will be so

effective that nobody can hope for much defense against them.

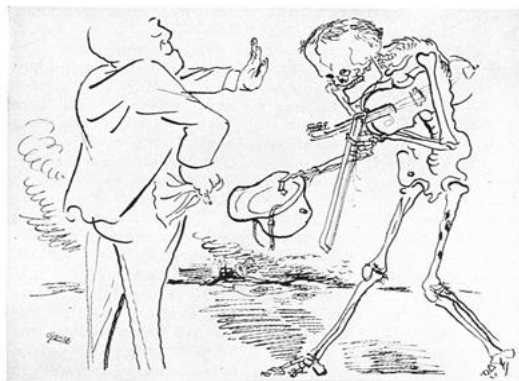
One cannot help wondering why the prophets of such despair always have a virtuous air as if they were conferring a favor! At best their predictions have no possible value as warnings, since the military future of every country is in the hands of specialists who are usually pretty much in the dark themselves. Supposedly, of course, there is some merit in depicting frightfulness so that the public may hate

and dread war. But the victim may hate and dread cancer as much as he pleases: he won't stand a chance of being cured until he becomes rational and co-operates in the best-known methods of treatment.

Likewise the man who doesn't want to lose his shirt in a coming great war will do well to keep his shirt on right now. There is little enough reason for optimism; but there is even less reason for swallowing guesses which can only lead to mass-fear—or, after enough reiterations, to mass-indifference.

Fear and indifference, it may be recalled, were among the emotional causes of the last war. The crowds of 1914 which gathered before bulletin boards in every European capital were probably more worried than valiant as they shouted "On to Paris!" or "On to Berlin!" During the past twenty years they had been so prodded with alarms that they were psychologically prepared for the slaughter rather than deterred. Their seeming enthusiasm was more often the exaltation of despair; the worst had come at last, after so many warnings, and it was a relief to have action substituted for dread.

Few enough of the survivors recalled in 1918 that their oracles had achieved an almost magnificent record of wrong guesses. . . . Instead of displaying a super-modernity of weapons and tactics such as was never known before, the armies of 1914 revealed that they hadn't caught up with the military lessons of 1865, let alone the four wars within their own decade. The much-touted machine



DRAWINGS BY GEORGE GROSZ

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One Man's Guess

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guns and airplanes were conspicuous only by their absence in worthwhile quantities; the new Napoleons soon turned out to be dazed, elderly civilians in uniform. Finally the two unwieldy masses of humanity collided, and without benefit of generalship they fought it out along military lines of the past century until one side reeled back in exhaustion.

The prophets had overlooked the timeless fact that weapons and tactics depend upon the men who direct them. In the early 1900's, for instance, a rising colonel named Foch published two widely acclaimed treatises on war. They were so ultra-modern as to be admittedly based on the theories of Clausewitz, who wrote in 1825 to interpret the warfare of 1794. But the future generalissimo of the Allies became so absorbed in the metaphysical merits of the offensive that he missed a point in elementary tactics. It never once seems to have occurred to him that the bright red breeches of the French soldier would make an excellent target!

Meanwhile an obscure pacifist was exhibiting a far keener insight into the next war than all the generals of Europe. The date was 1897. Then, as now, the newspapers and magazines were shrieking warnings of the coming conflict. It would be repetition to describe them, for they were styled like those of today except for differences in weapons. The various nations were not mentioned out loud, but it was intimated that the Germans would bombard and capture Paris within a few weeks—or, if you felt that way about it, that the Russian hordes would reduce Berlin in one brutal, ruthless offensive.

Yet in 1897, I. S. Bloch, a Jewish banker and pacifist of Warsaw, published a long book called *The Future of War* which reads today like history rather than foresight. He merely ignored all fantasies based upon future weapons and dug deep into the past. Without pretending to be either a political or military expert, he evolved the following summary from economics and history—in other words, from recorded antics of human nature:

"The war, instead of being a hand-to-hand contest, in which the combatants will measure their physical and moral superiority will become a kind of stalemate in which, neither army being willing to get at the other, each army will be maintained in opposition to the other, threatening the other but never being able to deliver a final and decisive attack. . . . That is the future of war—not fighting but famine, not the slaying of men but the bankruptcy of nations and the break-up of the whole social organization. . . . It will be a great war of entrenchments. The spade will be as indispensable to a soldier as a rifle. . . . All warfare will of necessity

partake of the character of siege operations. Your soldiers may fight as much as they please; the ultimate decision is in the hands of famine!"

But the world of 1897, oddly enough, thought itself just as modern as the world of today; it refused to believe that its machine guns could be defeated by such Neanderthalic weapons as fear, famine and exhaustion. The stalemate ended in several well-established cases of European cannibalism before a few people recalled a forgotten book by a Polish pacifist.

It would be presumptuous to hope for such startling accuracy in estimating the possibilities of a coming war; but at least the observer may apply the same principles to the best of his knowledge. In the showdown he will probably come closer than most of the recent soothsayers of a "new Armageddon."

The first of these principles is that the man is still the unit of war, not the machine. Whatever the improvements in weapons, nobody has ever yet produced an invention which would alter human nature by turning on the ignition. That is the basis for Napoleon's dictum that the moral is to the material in war as ten to one. It probably explains the fact that in past wars effective tactics have been evolved by trial and error on the battlefield rather than the desk. In brief, the general proposes—but the buck private disposes!

Thus the glib seers of tremendous tactical surprises at the outset of a next war may be taken with a grain of salt. It is well to remember that for all the talk of improved weapons, every country in Europe is still putting its faith in the heaviest battalions. This reliance on bulk is in itself a confession that the new war lords aren't sure either of their weapons or tactics.

Bulk and bunk, the experts agree, were the military Frankenstein of the last disaster. But it doesn't require strategical genius to realize that opposing forces of several millions each will probably arrive at a stalemate in the effort to outflank each other. There is the historical fact, moreover, that no commander so far, Napoleon included, has ever yet demonstrated his competency to direct the tactics of a million men in the field. Sherman, the most penetrating and coherent general since Napoleon, estimated a tenth of that number as the natural limit.

Again it may be doubted if either side in a coming war can hope for the opportunities which the Central Powers muffed in 1914. Outweighed "on paper," Germany actually held a tremendous superiority at the outset. Her allies were dependent and subservient, her organization and plans had been perfected years

Continued on page 166

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One Man's Guess

Continued from pages 69-165

before, and she occupied the hub of the strategical wheel against enemies on the rim. Yet for all of these advantages she was hurled back within two months by a pathetically unready French army.

Next time the signs point to alliances on both sides which will be no more cordial than the relations of the Allies in the World War. Such coalitions have a long tradition of deadlock and frustration, since the loathing of the partners for each other is likely to be only slightly less than their mutual hatred of the enemy.

Of course it is being freely vaunted once more that the venerable rule will not hold good in a new war—that the defensive will no longer prove mightier than the offensive. For the shibboleth of the invincible attack dominates military thought today as it has ever since 1815. The recent vogue is for a neurotic Italian warrior, the late General Giulio Douhet, who has convinced many followers that the bombing plane, an entirely offensive weapon, will render resistance futile in a modern war of terrorism. But in 1903 Foch likewise believed that the improved weapons of his day had loaded the dice in favor of the relentless advance. "Formerly," he wrote, "many guns were needed to produce an effect: today only a few suffice". . . . Historical note: at Ypres in 1917 the British army fired 4,300,000 shells—107,000 tons of shrieking hot metal at a cost of \$110,000,000—in order to gain a few worthless kilometres reduced to swamp by the bombardment.

Spiritually all these ideas of the "new offensive," the deadly thrust to strike down a still crouching enemy, stem back to Napoleon. Nevertheless his wars remain among the greatest historical proofs of the defensive. The moment his foes realized that they had been merely dazed, not knocked out, he was no longer able to prevail in one whirlwind rush. Austria, Spain and Russia proved in turn that a resolute defense was proof even against the master. And finally Napoleon himself, with his back to the wall, put up a defense on French soil which won the admiration even of his encircling enemies.

After half a century of European peace—or at least absence of widespread war—only the Emperor's lashing offensives were remembered. The astonishing Prussian victories over Austria and France were accepted as dazzling new evidence that Napoleon was great and Clausewitz was his prophet. It was soon forgotten that the decadent Austrian army had pitted muzzle-loading rifles against modern breech-loaders. It was forgotten that after the equally unprepared French armies collapsed in five weeks, an aroused civilian population held out for five months against the entire Prussian war machine.

During this same decade the European military mind also chose to ignore unpleasant object lessons from across the Atlantic which were not fully appreciated until after 1918. But the terrific, long-drawn campaigns of Grant, Lee and Sherman made it plain that one man in the rifle pits was equal to two attacking bayonets. If further testimony was needed, there was the frightful struggle in which little Paraguay held out for nearly six years against the combined forces of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The statistics are sinister: at the outbreak of war in 1864 the population of Paraguay was 1,337,439; at the end the survivors numbered 28,746 men, 106,254 women and 86,079 children.

Offhand it would seem that the military trade, of all others, should be distinguished for unflinching realism. The professional soldier at best is the surgeon of Society who amputates after political pills have failed of a cure; hence one might expect a coolly scientific outlook from the practitioners of war.

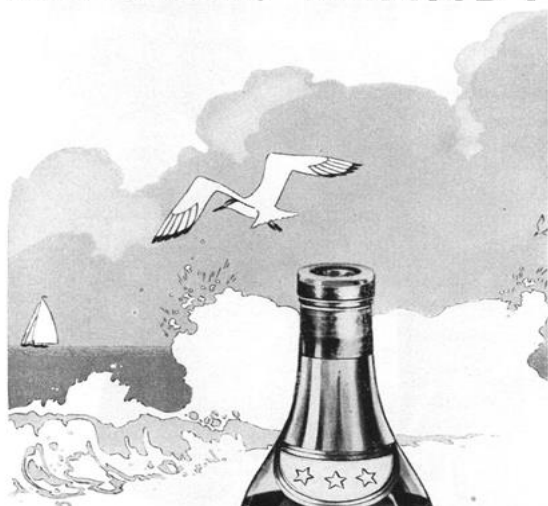
On the contrary, military treatises more often betray wishful thinking which would have shamed Dr. Pangloss as a croaking pessimist. At various periods European staff officers have gone in for strategical cure-alls or metaphysical tactics too dubious for the average civilian. The reason is doubtless because the general, unlike the surgeon, devotes his active career to treating mild cases of tactical mumps and measles; then after a lifetime of theory, he is suddenly called upon to perform a major strategical operation in his professional dotage. Meanwhile, like the White Queen, he has usually become an adept in the ancient pastime of believing things before breakfast.

Twenty years ago this impressionable proved far more important to millions of men than any innovations in weapons. The generals who had been talking in terms of howitzers revealed a quaint faith in the *arme blanche* of their military treatises! It made no difference that according to casualty lists the bayonet has always been more of a theory than a weapon. The elderly, thick-waisted romanticists of the World War believed in it literally. They believed that recently conscripted farmers and factory hands would lose morale unless they were frequently hurled against the enemy's machine guns. . . . The moral result was mutiny—by soldiers who had come to fear and hate their own leaders more than the enemy. Meanwhile the only two decisive innovations of the war, gas and the tank, were rendered impotent by professional conservatism on both sides.

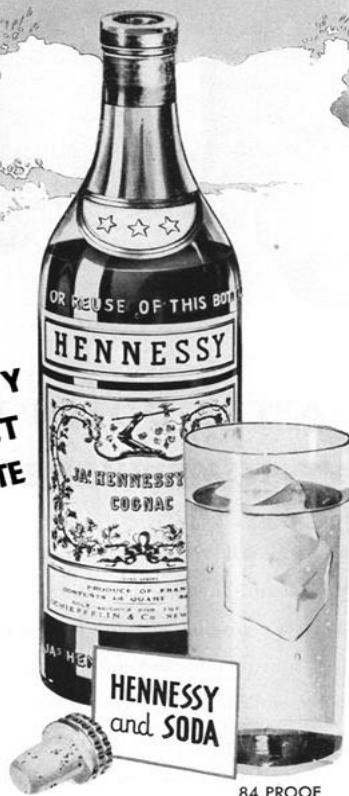
In the end, of course, every encounter of that dreary siege became a duel of shells—of money coined into steel. The big guns

Continued on page 168

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One Man's Guess

Continued from pages 69-165-166

gained the ground; the bayonets occupied it. And as the Polish pacifist had foreseen, the war was finally decided by the most ancient weapons on earth.

It is the fear of these same age-old weapons that is causing a great deal of obviously wishful thinking in European military circles again today. The generals of 1937 are protesting too much about their bombing planes! They realize that it is not merely desirable to win a next war in one quick offensive—it is absolutely necessary for all but a few countries with enormous resources.

Despite this urgency, military signs point to another great deadlock ending in famine and exhaustion. So far neither Ethiopia nor Spain has offered much evidence to the contrary. The late Arthur Brisbane was impressed by Italy's performance in Africa, it is true, but most military critics found it a run-of-the-mill colonial expedition in which, as usual, the prize fighter got the best of the gorilla. The events of civil war in Spain, according to present sketchy and often biased reports, have shown more than the ordinary odds in favor of the stubborn defensive. On several occasions mere armed civilians have held out for astonishingly long periods against planes and artillery in the hands of regulars aided by trained foreign allies.

Otherwise the conditions of today are strikingly similar to those of 1913. Again the eyes of the whole world are on Germany's every move, with Italy taking Austria's former place in the spotlight. Again France and England are making earnest but belated preparations. And again Russia represents the formidable X of the military equation, as she has on the eve of every world war during the past two centuries. She has seldom if ever come up to advance ballyhoo, and the keenest observers are hinting that once more her military power has been vastly overrated. But Charles XII, Frederick the Great, Napoleon and Wilhelm II all broke their hearts against that wall of flesh, and it may be that Russia will repeat her unique historical rôle.

Today the various dictators have created a convincing hocus-pocus about a European civil war between Fascism and Communism, but in reality the same old motives of national, economic and territorial aggression are crouching behind the frontiers. Indeed, from a laboratory point of view, the causes of the modern war may be compared to its principal ingredient. Gunpowder merely illuminates if ignited under ordinary conditions; but pack it so that the gases can't escape and it explodes. The Europe of today, like that of 1913, has been packed! Its trade, its finances, its politics, its ambitions, even its scholarship, have been tamped down within national borders rather than being allowed to expand

naturally. Thus instead of illuminating, a whole continent is about to explode.

The only important differences between 1913 and today are those of degree. Then the world had known no great conflict for a century; now Europe is still haggard from the last tremendous effort while straining every nerve toward the next. Then the annual price tag of war preparations was three and a half billion dollars; now the burden is exactly four times as heavy on a bankrupt generation which hasn't yet been able to pay the fiddler for the last *danse macabre*.

Thus if a quick and forthright decision really is reached, it will likely be due to such enervating preliminaries rather than subsequent new weapons or tactics. There is no longer a valid question as to when hostilities will begin—they have already begun in the present punishing race of armaments! Probably no ruler in Europe could say definitely when a more violent phase will take place; it may have happened by the time this is printed, or it may be postponed to incredible lengths. In April, 1893, for instance, *Munsey's* magazine pooh-poohed editorially, "The prophecy of a coming outbreak has been so often made during the last dozen years, and so uniformly falsified, that it has almost come to be regarded as a meaningless cry of 'wolf'!"

Today only the most hardy optimist could hope for a further respite of two decades. Millions of Europeans, notably in the dictator-ruled nations, have undergone most of the material sacrifices and psychological intensity of actual war during the last several years. Athletes quickly go stale under like conditions, and it may be wondered how long such peoples can endure the added test of the real thing. The French, Austrian, Russian and Italian armies of the World War, you may remember, took only about two years to make the transition from the crashing salute to open insubordination.

But with the possible exception of dictators, who always run the historical risk of self-deception, nobody believes today that a full-fledged modern conflict can be won even by the victors. So it will perhaps be a boon, as well as a miracle, if one group of combatants actually is crushed in the first breath-taking offensive, however humiliating to national pride that result might be.

For the modern war is capable of dealing out far worse casualties than the air raid victim of the news pictures. Famine and exhaustion can't be photographed so graphically! And there is no way at all to photograph that aftermath of moral misery and despair which leads war-rotted peoples to sell their political birthright for a dictator's mess of pottage. #



George GROSZ (1893 - 1959)

"George Grosz gave a fantastic testimony of Berlin life during a terrible period, divided between fascism and communism. He was active in the communist party but had an anarchist's fascination for the characters of underground life. Military figures, prostitutes and violence abound, and fascinate the viewer [...] this meant he instinctively rooted his art in the common people. It also explains, I think, why caricature and graphic design in magazines and newspapers held such an appeal for him."

*Quote of Mario Vargas Llosa
'You nourish yourself with everything you hate', George Grosz, in TATE ETC. Magazine (Spring 2007)*