

PRESS & TELEVISION

can combat historian S.L.A. Marshall called him (in 1940) the father of blitzkrieg tactics?

It is true, Alfoldi explains, that when Germany's chief of staff, Erich Ludendorff, launched his surprise offensive in Flanders on March 21, 1918, his spectacular initial successes came with the advance of Hutier's Eighteenth Army, which gained 39 kilometers in just four days. But Hutier (and other German commanders) used new infiltration tactics evolved by Ludendorff as part of a defensive doctrine for trench warfare. Crediting Hutier with all this was the work of Allied print media, beginning with the French, who, Alfoldi suggests, needed an enemy "genius" to explain a shocking setback and preferred one with a French name and Huguenot ancestors.

ARTS & LETTERS

*A Good Theater
Is Hard to Find*

"Toward an Architecture of the Theater as a Human Art" by Martin Bloom, in the *AIA Journal* (June 1976), 1735 New York Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

Stage producers, directors, and playwrights often criticize the theaters in which they work. Joseph Papp, producer of New York's Shakespeare Festival, has called the elaborate National Arts Center at Ottawa "a bad theater," while Tennessee Williams refers to New York's Circle in the Square as a "gymnasium." The Helen Hayes and the Morosco, both built before 1920 and slated for demolition, rate as satisfactory, says Bloom, a New York City architect. "The sightlines and acoustics are good and the relationship between the auditorium and stage is such that one is easily drawn into the event."

Generally, there have been three approaches to theater design. First, an innovative architect takes a visionary approach and, too often, overwhelms theatrical effectiveness with his own technical virtuosity (e.g., the Dallas Theater Center by Frank Lloyd Wright and Paul Baker). A second approach is that motivated by the philosophies of stage directors, and the success of the outcome depends on the "buoyancy and vitality of the original idea" (e.g., Jacques Copeau's *Vieux Colombier* in Paris). These theaters usually work well only under the influence of the original creator. A third approach, a kind of "consensus eclectic," inspires most theater construction. Building codes rather than aesthetics have the strongest influence on design. These theaters, though uninspired, tend to provide good sightlines and silent air conditioning. Largely overlooked in theater architecture, says Bloom, is "the relating of spectators to performers so that both feel deep commitment to the event." One way to achieve it, he suggests, is to study the few existing successful theaters before they are demolished.