
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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[Harvard University]

FDR Speech File

The Boston Globe, Tuesday, January 15, 1978

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harvard, '04, and now Assistant Secretary of the Navy spoke on the broad topic "The United States Navy" last evening at Harvard University. He commented particularly on the types of craft now in use and described their special fields.

In describing the work of the Navy Department before Feb. 1, he said that it did not lack money for ships in the appropriation bills, but rather money to pay men to man these ships, to fit out shipbuilding yards, and to purchase supplies. Since Feb. 1 the Government was hampered by slow decisions on types of ships to build, but once the work had gotten under way, it had progressed rapidly.

He discussed the control of the seas, both on and below the surface. the battle for the supremacy of the underseas is still being fought, as the German submarines have increased their cruising radius enormously since the beginning of the war. At present these are using a mounted gun a great deal more than the torpedo as the former is cheaper and can be carried in far larger numbers.

Had the German U-boats been able to continue their sinkings at their early rate, he said, they could have practically destroyed British shipping inside of 18 months and compelled peace.

ONLY ONE-TENTH OF WHAT'S NEEDED

"At present" he continued "the Allies have not one-tenth the number of patrolling vessels necessary for the absolute safety of their merchant ships against the undersea craft. Destroyers have been found to be the best-fitted for combating them. It is interesting to know that there was an immediate falling off of sinkings in the sectors assigned to the American destroyers.

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"To supplement these the 110 foot patrol boat has been built. While these are not always the most comfortable boats in the world to live on, they have already proven their sea-going qualities. The larger yachts have been unable to stand up under the rough weather off the southern coast of England and Scotland, but these small craft, although hurriedly built of wood have done excellent work.

"They usually travel in twos or threes, but there is comparatively little fear of them being sent to the bottom by a U-boat, as they are too shallow to be struck by a torpedo."

CAREFUL ABOUT DEPTH CHARGES

Mr. Roosevelt was very cautious in speaking about the new depth charge. "This was originally a 50-pound charge," he said "but the weight has been increased and with it a more than corresponding area of destruction. The increase has been so great that the speed of the ship dropping the depth charge over her stern on the U-boat below must be knots an hour or there is considerable danger that the surface ships will suffer some of the damage themselves.

"We don't know what the 110-footers will do. They can only make 17 knots. "The United States is obliged to rely on the British fleet to maintain supremacy on the surface of the seas. This the latter has never lost since the beginning of the war despite all German reports to the contrary. It has been the habit of the German ships to come out of the Kiel Canal whenever the British ships have been obliged to put back to the north of Scotland to provision.

BRITISH FLEET EFFICIENCY

"At one time when the fleet had gone into port news came that the Germans were out again. Despite the fact that over 2000 sailors were given liberty

only two hours before, the British fleet was away toward the North Sea in just 22 minutes from the time the news arrived. That was British efficiency.

"Our merchant marine is not going to be put out of commission by the U-boat guns. Proper convoying arrangements have been made. More than 1000 merchant ships have been armed with guns for defense. Many of the guns used are those of the five and six inch type taken from the older battleships.

In closing, Mr. Roosevelt said "One thing is very clear: the college graduates make better officers than the undergraduates. I cannot help but feeling that it is the duty of every undergraduate not only to himself but to his country to obtain all the education possible so that he may become a better citizen not only in time of war but during the rest of the years that he has to live. It will call for a moral sacrifice but a sacrifice which is well worthwhile and which will repay the Nation."

May 23, 1950.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's
Speech, "Our Armed Power on the Sea" at
Harvard U., Cambridge, Mass., 5 p.m., Jan. 14,
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RLJ

RAILROAD CONTROL BILL

The law under which the United States Government will control and operate all the railroads of the country for the duration of the war was passed by Congress on March 14, 1918, and sent to the President to be signed. Among its chief provisions are those: Government control of the roads shall not continue more than twenty-one months after the war; there is an appropriation of \$500,000,000 for a revolving fund; the short lines are included within the Federal system, and compensation of the railroads is provided for on the basis of their average net income for the three years ended June 30, 1917, amounting approximately to \$945,000,000 annually. The bill also provides that the State power of taxation of carriers shall be undisturbed, and that the Interstate Commerce Commission shall be the final arbiter of rates, in the fixing of which

increases in expense due to the war are to be taken into consideration.

Following the passing of the bill, plans for the future organization of the Government Railroad Administration were discussed the same night at a conference between President Wilson and Mr. McAdoo, Director General of Railroads. One of the first tasks is making contracts with the operating companies for Government compensation on the basis provided in the bill. The contracts are to be negotiated under the direction of John Barton Payne, chief counsel; John Skelton Williams, Finance Director, and C. A. Protry, Chief of the Division of Accounts. The railroads have been ordered by Director General McAdoo to make an inventory of materials and supplies on hand Dec. 31, 1917, when private control ceased, for use in connection with Government administration of purchases, additions and betterments, and railroad financing.

Our Soldiers Insured for \$12,000,000,000

Nearly All Have \$10,000 Policies

[The appended summary of the work of the War Risk Board is based on a recent study by Lawrence Keady, President of the National Association of Life Underwriters]

THE act creating this insurance as passed by Congress and approved by the President Oct. 6, 1917, makes three separate and distinct provisions for those in active military service:

1. Family allowances and compulsory savings.
2. Compensation for death and disability.
3. Optional life insurance.—(Meaning that, in addition to the benefits provided under the first two headings, those who desire may purchase additional life and disability insurance.) The insurance to be issued on the yearly renewable term plan.

The act provided that any person then in the military service would be insured automatically against death and permanent disability for the sum of approximately \$5,000, provided he had a wife, child, or widowed mother. Persons joining the service after that have the privilege of applying for the insurance within 120 days after enlistment. The automatic feature expired Feb. 12,

At the time of the passage of this act those representatives of the Government who were particularly instrumental in promoting the measure believed that with the passage of the bill there would be a tremendous demand for this insurance, but it was early discovered that the demand had to be created; that "life insurance is sold and not bought," and this notwithstanding the fact that the guarantee back of the contract is the United States Government itself, and that it is offered at a cost to the insured of about one-tenth of what it will cost to provide the insurance.

For example, the Government offers to insure all applicants (up to \$10,000) at age 20 for \$7.68 per \$1,000 per annum. (Most of the Government premiums are payable monthly.) At age 30 the Government rate is only \$8.28 per \$1,000.

The Government policy also furnishes

OUR SOLDIERS INSURED FOR \$12,000,000,000

disability insurance in addition to life insurance. The rates for four ages are:

Age.	Govt. Rate.	Govt. Rate.
20.....	\$7.68	\$8.28
30.....	\$8.28	\$10.00

While the premium paid by the soldier is very small, it is believed that the cost to the Government for those soldiers who take part in actual warfare will be about \$80 per thousand per annum.

The preliminary campaigns to induce the soldiers to take out insurance were not entirely successful, so on Dec. 20 the Secretary of the Treasury summoned to Washington a group of practical insurance men. That group was told that it was the earnest desire of the Secretary of the Treasury and others in charge of the administration of this measure that the benefits of this insurance should be clearly and forcefully presented to all clearly and forcefully presented to all soldiers and sailors then in the service, and this group was asked to arrange a campaign for the sale of this insurance.

The responsibility for this campaign was vested in a smaller group, known as the Soldiers' and Sailors' Campaign Council, and they spent about ten days

investigating what had been done; how it had been done, and in planning a selling campaign to be conducted with more or less uniformity at all military and naval stations, and this campaign was launched Jan. 12. Up to that time there had been received at the Bureau of War Risk Insurance 427,811 applications for a total of \$3,933,210,000. (an average of \$8,493 per person.)

The records indicate that the work done was highly successful, for at the close of the campaign, Feb. 12, there had been actually received at the bureau 1,123,749 applications for a total of \$9,189,155,500 insurance, and on March 6 the applications received or in transit totaled more than \$12,000,000,000, covering 1,500,000 persons in the military and naval service.

In many of the units of the various camps every man has purchased the full ten thousand; there are eight camps in which 99 per cent. of the men are insured by the Government, and on Feb. 28 more than 90 per cent. of all the men in the service had availed themselves of this privilege. The average policy on the lives of our soldiers was \$9,186.

War Activities of the United States Navy

Address by Franklin D. Roosevelt

Assistant Secretary of the Navy

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, in a recent address to the Harvard Alumni Association, threw some new light on the work of the United States Navy in European waters. He said in part:

THERE are two present phases of naval warfare, the first being the anti-submarine defense and second the battleship fleet. We sent a few destroyers in April, 1917, and kept sending more during the following months. These destroyers operated in certain localities on the other side, and charts plotted to show the sinkings by submarines proved an immediate falling off in the number of sinkings in these zones. The difficulty is that the ocean is altogether too large to cover as a whole with anti-submarine craft.

As a matter of fact, sinkings are still

going on in very great numbers. Those sinkings are almost wholly confined to a small area within a short distance of land. You would think the Allies would be able to control this area, but we have not one-tenth the amount of equipment necessary to patrol all the waters close to shore, let alone further out. The reason submarines go close to shore is because there they find a concentration of ships as almost day and night a continuous procession of merchant ships go up and out of the English Channel, Irish Channel, &c.

It is quite a mistaken notion to think

that; the English Channel is closed to submarines or that all the submarines have their base on the Belgian coast. Only some of the older and smaller submarines and mine layers are there; the majority of the larger ones coming out from Wilhelmshaven, which is on the North Sea side of the canal, or from Kiel, on the Baltic side.

We are making as good a contribution as we can toward the increase of patrols. We are building a great number of destroyers, which we hope to have completed in from ten to sixteen months. That seems a long time, but under the 1916 program the best bid for completion was twenty-five months, and getting down to ten, or even sixteen, months is quite an achievement. In addition to the destroyers, we are turning out other types. We have turned out a type of vessel which has taken the officers by surprise. This is called the 110-foot patrol boat. It is very interesting, built of wood and propelled by gasoline. A great number of these boats have been placed in commission already, and on their sea trips they seem to have excellent sea-keeping qualities.

In fighting the submarine the depth charge is very useful and effective. These charges have a small piece of mechanism which is set, and when the bomb has descended to a given depth it will explode; it can be set to explode at any depth. The first depth charges were these of fifty pounds, and they would hurt a submarine only if they went off almost in actual contact. The result was that they had to be increased in size, and now the depth charges weigh much more than fifty pounds, and their area of destruction is large. One interesting feature of increasing the size of depth charges was that we had to increase the speed of the ship to protect the ship itself.

Much work has also been done on other devices that we may not talk about. Experimentation is going on, and will increase if the war lasts, and it will in the end prove an effective answer to the submarine. The answer to the submarine is being carried out by building as many vessels against them as can possibly be

built, and, second, by building all the merchant tonnage we can and arming that merchant tonnage.

We are apt to forget that over on the other side the control of the surface of the ocean has been absolutely maintained by the existence of the British battleship fleet. There have been a few raids on the coast of England and on her possessions in the North Sea, but today the relative strength of the British Navy is at least as great against the German Navy as at the outbreak of the war. Furthermore, they have the active co-operation of the French and American surface ships of heavy tonnage. We have, of course, many battleships on this coast that little is heard about. We have had to use the oldest ones largely as training schools, especially for the training of the gun crews of the merchant ships.

We have already armed over 1,000 merchant ships with fairly heavy guns. There have been few, and there will be fewer, cases of American ships being successfully shelled and put out of action by the submarine. We learned the lesson from the English.

As to surface control no one is worried. The British, with the assistance of the Americans, have successfully bottled up the Germans in the North Sea. It is a pity to have to hold them on defensive terms only. There are many who believe in the dictum that a defensive policy on the sea leads to defeat, and the rôle of the British battleship fleet has been considered by many to be purely defensive. However, authorities like Mahan and others have always maintained that an offensive can consist of two methods of war; first, to seek the enemy and destroy him in his own 'rat hole'; secondly, so to place yourself about the 'mouth of the rat hole' that the rat cannot come out. That is practically what has happened. The Germans are free at any time to come out with their battleship fleet, and very often they do come out, but for a very short distance. The stories we read from Berlin that the Germans came out for three days, etc., are true, but they have always kept conveniently close to their hiding place.

So ready is the British fleet that it is said that on one occasion they had given shore liberty to many hundreds of men; then word came that the German

fleet was out and might be cut off, and within twenty-two minutes the British fleet was ready and on the way to the scene of action.

Shipbuilding Difficulties Overcome

Mr. Hurley's Report of Progress

THE shipbuilding program adopted by the United States as an urgent war measure encountered many obstructions, including those due to the worst winter in the recorded history of the Eastern United States. The Spring of 1918, however, has found definite results accomplished in many new shipyards that have been brought into existence since the United States entered the war.

Figures issued by the Shipping Board on March 9 showed that in February seventeen vessels of 120,700 tons were completed and put into service. The total was nearly twice that of January, admittedly a bad month, when only nine vessels, with a tonnage of 79,541, were delivered. Launchings more than kept pace with deliveries, sixteen ships of 112,500 tons being put into the water in January, and fifteen of 77,900 tons in February. Of the vessels completed in February, fifteen were cargo carriers, one was a tanker, and one a collier.

Summing up the situation on March 4, 1918, Edward N. Hurley, Chairman of the Shipping Board, said that there were then 139 shipyards, with 700 ways and 500,000 men, occupied with the production of 1,000 ships. A Seattle shipyard had already broken all world's records by launching an 8,000-ton steel ship in sixty-four days, and yards on the Atlantic Coast were preparing to beat the Pacific Coast record.

At the Hog Island yard of the American International Shipbuilding Corporation the first keel was laid on Feb. 12, six days ahead of schedule time, and on Feb. 28, the date set for the second keel, there were ways ready for ten additional and shipyard, the largest in the world, will be found under a separate heading.

On March 1 it was reported that vessels were to come from the plant of the Federal Shipbuilding Company at Kearny, N. J., six weeks ahead of the time fixed in the contract with the Government.

Instead of finishing one ship every month the yard had reached a stage wherein it could finish one ship every three weeks. The Federal Shipbuilding Company was incorporated in July, 1917, by the United States Steel Corporation. At that time the 175 acres occupied by the yard went under six feet of water every time the tide came in. Now they have been built up nine feet, and twelve miles of railroad track have been laid. Five thousand men will be employed when shipbuilding is in full swing.

In a much more advanced condition in every respect is the new shipyard of the Merchants' Shipbuilding Corporation at Bristol, Penn., the second of the huge fabricating yards being built for the construction of standardized steel merchant ships. In respect to the number of ways there is the smallest of the three, for while there are to be fifty ways for building ships at Hog Island and twenty-eight ways at the yard at Port Newark, at the Bristol plant there are only twelve. The Bristol plant, however, is to build the largest ships of the three yards, freighters of 9,000 tons deadweight capacity, while 7,500-ton and 8,000-ton ships are to be built at Hog Island, and 5,000-ton vessels at Port Newark.

The shipyard of the Submarine Boat Corporation on Newark Bay, with twenty-eight shipways, has thirteen keels laid of the fifty ships of 5,000 tons which it is under contract to build before it begins work on another contract of 100 vessels of the same size.

The important question of housing the armies of workers was settled on March