
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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On board U.S.S. George Washington

February 21, 1919

Speech on board U.S.S. George Washington

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This is a summary of an address delivered by FDR on board the U.S.S. George Washington, (Capt. McCauley, Comdg.) on Feb. 21, 1919 on his return from Europe with President Wilson.

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TALK OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

On Friday afternoon Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, addressed an audience of about 500 bluejackets on the work of the U. S. Navy during the late war.

The Secretary was introduced by Captain McCauley and, with three hearty cheers, was welcomed as one of our shipmates. With pointer in hand he turned to a large map of Western Europe and began to tell us something of what OUR Navy had done, basing his remarks on his very appropriate statement that while the men had been able to learn all about Brest and Hoboken, there was probably a great part of our operations about which we had but hazy ideas.

One of the first statements which attracted attention was that we had 359 vessels of all classes based on European Ports, and a total of 54 stations located in different parts of Great Britain, Ireland, France, Italy, Greece, Gibraltar and the Azores. Of these, 20 were seaplane stations, and the men listened with keen interest to a short but graphic outline of the work of our planes, especially along the coast of France, in keeping open the transport routes for troops, munitions and supplies. The Secretary spoke of his visit to the great aviation base at Pauillac; and laid strong emphasis on the fact that owing to the difficulty of securing French labor it had been necessary to call on the men in blue to do most of the work -- the Department had put the work up to them and they just simply "came across" as usual. An amusing incident he related was that at the time the Pauillac base was first started there had been about 2000 men sent to them for whom they had no accommodations -- but they did have a lot of very fine packing cases in which seaplanes had been shipped,

and being summer time the men were very comfortable in them for the two or three weeks before accommodations were provided.

Perhaps one of the most interesting descriptions in the whole talk was of the work of the mine layers in putting down the North Sea Mine Barrage. Heretofore we have probably all had very rough ideas of what constituted a mine barrage, and it certainly opened our eyes to be told that the laying of the barrage from the Orkney Islands across the North Sea to Norway, if entirely completed, would have meant putting down 100,000 individual mines at a cost of \$50,000,000! This work was done by agreement with the British Admiralty, whereby the U. S. Navy undertook to do four-fifths and the British Navy one-fifth. When the war ended, on November 11, 1918, we had laid a total of 56,613 mines at a cost of \$31,000,000, and the British had laid 13,652 mines at a cost of \$7,000,000. From the wonderfully graphic description of the operation and working radius of these "Made in America" mines, it was easy to understand why Fritzie's "tin fish" operations were seriously hampered.

We were then told that aside from the 54 stations in Europe we had battleships with the Grand Fleet, battleships based on Ireland, several radio stations, the famous Naval battery of 14 inch guns serving with the U. S. Army, and, last but not least, the United States Marines.

The Secretary spoke very feelingly of the wonderfully heroic work of the Marines with the Second Division at Chateau Thierry, Belleau Woods, Soissons, St. Mihiel and other points. In the Marine Brigade their total casualties in these engagements were over 100 per cent., though their strength was kept at 8000 men by replacements; but they came out on top just the same and have a record for the capture of more prisoners and artillery, and advancing more kilometers, than any other

Division. Their heroism and fighting qualities will occupy a prominent place in our record of the war, and we are all proud that they are a part of the Navy organization.

In closing, the Secretary told the men that his recent trip to Europe had been in connection with the demobilisation of materials and personnel; that of an original force of 75,000 officers and men in European waters about 50,000 had already been sent home, and that the balance would certainly follow as rapidly as they could possibly be spared. He appreciated how hard it was for the men in the transport service to stick it through, now that the war was over, when they probably had business of their own to take care of at home, but appealed to them, in view of the fact that we still have 1,800,000 soldiers in France who must be carried home, to keep a stiff upper lip and see the job through to the end; and when we do finally get home we will all be proud for the rest of our lives to have been on the job, from start to finish, with the U. S. Navy.