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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**NEW YORK COUNTY LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION**

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
115 BROADWAY  
NEW YORK

March 22nd, 1919.

Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,  
Assistant Secretary of the Navy,  
Washington, D. C.

My dear Sir:-

It is the custom to print in the year book of our Association the addresses delivered at the Annual Bar Dinner, and I enclose herewith a transcript of the stenographer's notes of your address delivered at the Victory Dinner on the 8th of March.

I will thank you to look it over and return it to me at your convenience.

I have the honor to remain

Yours very truly,

*Abraham J. Rose*  
Secretary.

(Enclosure)

## ADDRESS OF HONORABLE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Daniels asked me to express to you his great regret that he could not come tonight, but he decided only yesterday to cross the ocean to visit the scenes of our naval work on the other side and to take part in the various discussions that are going on now in regard to the future naval development of the associated nations. I need not tell you as fellow New Yorkers, how glad I am to have this chance to see you again.

I have had the great privilege myself of being on the other side twice during this war and of seeing something at first hand of the operations of both the army and the navy and I am ~~very glad, I am a little surprised frankly,~~ very agreeably surprised that up to this time we have had no talk at home or abroad about who won the war, ~~and~~ I think we all subscribe to that poem ~~that~~ Judge Gildersleeve read, that there is glory enough for all. And so, <sup>while</sup> we in the Navy have been <sup>of necessity</sup> ~~perhaps~~ the silent service ~~of necessity~~ and while the <sup>officers and men who did the work,</sup> ~~navy~~ will always be silent, ~~the officers and men who have done the work,~~ I think it is perfectly proper for one who is only a civilian ~~who loves~~ the Navy, to say something about what

we have done in the past two years; for people perhaps don't realize that the Navy's preparation for this war, the actual active preparation, began about February, 1917. It began by something entirely illegal, an act committed by a member of the bar of the State of New York, <sup>temporarily in Washington</sup> the obligation of a very large sum of money to start the building of patrol vessels- one of a number of acts that your fellow member of the bar has committed in the past few years which under a strict interpretation of the law, would probably give him a jail sentence of about 999 years. For it was at the end of February, 1917, that we began the construction of a small type of vessel, a type which was rather laughed at; and people wondered whether it could ever cross the ocean, what good it ever would be in the case of war, a boat called the submarine chaser. And yet it is an actual fact that we began getting these boats over to the other side without loss in the autumn of the same year, and last November we had 168 of them in European waters, carrying out thereby the doctrine of the American Navy to go after the other fellow before he comes after you. It was a curious coincidence perhaps, that the whole character of the naval part of the war changed at ~~just~~ <sup>there</sup> about the ~~period~~ we came in, for up to that time, due to the great difficulties in France and England in turning our vessels in sufficient quantities to cope with the

submarines, it had been necessary to conduct a defensive campaign. As far as the surface went, we all know that that great fleet of England in the North Sea, and the fleet of France in the Mediterranean, made impossible any serious threat against the lines of supply by German surface craft. But the submarine had continued to grow in danger so that in April or May, 1917, the sinkings of tonnage assumed alarming proportions, and it was then that the general plan was adopted based on an offensive proposition--not only did we undertake to convoy and to put it more correctly, to escort the convoys of merchant ships and transports, we went further--we obtained the consent of Great Britain and the other powers to try out an American plan or a barrier in three places, to keep the German submarine from getting out on to the high seas, one across the Straits of Otranto to keep the submarines from coming out of the Ad--, another across the English Channel and another great mine barrier 220 miles long from ( ) to the coast of Norway. That was an American project, and out of the 100,000 mines, 80,000 were to be furnished by us and 20,000 by England. That was put into effect in the course of 1918, and while the barrier was not entirely completed, it had progressed sufficiently to make the exit of the German submarine a difficult operation, with the net result that where a year before the Germans had had twenty or twenty-five submarines

off the coast of Ireland and England and France at one time--that was something like the average in September and October of this year, that number had been reduced to less than ten.

The second phase was the complete protection of the neck of the bottle and there, in conjunction with the French and the British, we established coastal seaplane stations, equipped not only with sea planes, but with taut balloons and dirigibles, which kept the submarines away from the mouths of the harbors. The charts for the last few months of the war showed that practically no submarines were operating within seventy five miles of the French coast to which nearly all of our transports and supply ships went. Then came the final step, the use of the hunting boat. These tiny wasps of the sea, equipped with listening devices and depth charges, sent out from Queenstown and from Plymouth and from Brest, sent out ffrom far down in the Adriatic. They made the life of the few submarines that got out so miserable that they were able to conduct very slight operations against our troops and our supplies. In this war, when the history of it comes to be written, no men are going to get greater glory than those, most of them coming in from civil life, boys leaving college, who went into the Navy, studied for a while, and were placed on the converted yachts and the submarine

chasers and other small craft that were sent out in any kind of weather and at any time of day or night. Theirs was at least an interesting and exciting experience.

But we must not forget either to remember those men who did not have such an interesting task, many of whom never saw the enemy, the men who manned these troop ships and supply ships, the men under an admiral who is here with us tonight, Admiral Gleaves, who week in and week out took those ships across the ocean and back again, almost without loss and we can say too, that while the Navy took them across, the Navy will bring them back. A good deal has been said about the politics which were played at Washington at a recent date. I think it is safe to assume that no failure of an appropriation bill is going to prevent the Navy from bringing the troops back. Even if the Acting Secretary of the Navy has to go to jail for another 999 years.

But there is one little crowd of men in the Navy-- they are in the Navy but they have been working with the army, men who are honored alike by the Navy and the Army, men who have been through more fighting and have had heavier losses than any other troops on the other side. I remember very well in May, 1917, when it was decided that the Marines were to send a brigade to France with the first troops, that the Major General Commandant of the

Marine Corps came into my office with a new recruiting poster which he proposed to send out and it bore these words, "Join the Marines--First to Fight", and I said, "General, arn't you taking rather a long chance with that statement--you forget that they will be only a small part of the army over there." He said, "Well, it may be taking a chance, but I will trust the luck of the Marines." And so they went over with the first, and were made a part of one of the regular divisions, the Second Division, and whether it was luck or what it was, I don't know, but when the time came, although there had been a certain amount of exercising and training work in quiet sectors of the front before that, the first really serious operation of the war, the first time that our troops were in a battle position, was in that drive when the Germans were coming down the Marne and got within less than forty miles of Paris, and just outside of Chateau Thierry, the Second Division went in early in the morning, expecting a German attack about 4.20, but at 4.20 they got rather tired of sitting there and they went forward without waiting, and the result was that by the end of that day, the Germans were one mile nearer Berlin than they were in the morning and the Marines had the good fortune to go on with that kind of work. They were with the vanguard of American troops that started the offensive at Soissons on the 18th

of July. They were moved and took part in the reduction of the St Mihiel salient. After that, they were moved back, and with the French, broke the center of the line in the Champaign district at a place called Blanc M\_ and finally on the evening of the 10th of November last, within twenty four hours before the armistice went into effect, they forced a crossing of the Meuse River under heavy fire and at 11 o'clock the next day had advanced another six kilometers towards Berlin. And that is why I think I can say quite properly that we have a right to be proud of our Navy and Marine Corps, not forgetting that though we have grown in these two years from 60,000 men to over half a million, the basis of that organization, just as in the case of the Army, the basis of both the Army and the Navy lay in that splendid but small group of graduates of Annapolis and West Point. Without them, no matter how much you and I as civilians had tried to organize a great national military force, we could not have had the success of these two years. And so, no matter what the outcome is of the peace negotiations, and of the league of nations, no matter what we decide or other people decide about the size that we are going to keep our Army and Navy at, we have learned a lesson in this war, the lesson of preparation, the lesson of good, sufficient machinery, going to be handled by men who have

had some training, and I trust that in the let-down which is bound to follow any great national occasion, that we will not forget that some kind of training, some kind of universal national service, is the surest guarantee of national safety. I say that is in line with whatever the result of these negotiations may be, for while I am a sincere and an outspoken advocate of some form of league of nations, while I believe that we necessarily will carry out the purpose of this war, not merely the purpose of obtaining a military victory, but the purpose of doing what we can to prevent a recurrence of these events, still, no matter what comes, we must remember the United States of America, and guard ourselves, guard our bodies and guard our souls. This is a time of idealism, a time when more ideals are properly demanded of us, and over there on the other side, every man, woman and child looks to us to make good the high purpose with which we came into this war. I have no doubt that if the people of this country will look at this question in a broad, well considered purpose, that any draft of a league of nations, like any draft of the Constitution of the United States somewhere around 1787, will be, as it was then, open to objection or criticism by every individual man in the country on some one ground or another, for if you will go back in history you will find that every state

and pretty nearly every public man was dissatisfied 140 years ago with some one point in our Constitution. But bearing in mind that we must get the most perfect instrument that we can to guide our own national rights, bearing in mind also that it must be framed to the rights of other nations, I believe that we are going to go through with this and that when the final draft comes to us for approval, it will meet the hearty good will, not only of the American people, but by their representatives in the Senate of the United States.

In that way, Gentlemen, we shall carry out our outspoken purpose and in that way too, we will carry on the great things for which we have fought in the past and now.