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A R M Y I N D U S T R I A L C O L L E G E

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PROBLEMS OF SUPPLY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE GENERAL STAFF

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Gentlemen:

I hope you will not think that it is a mere platitude when I say that it always gives me the keenest pleasure to visit the Industrial College. Though I had far rather be a listener than a speaker, I always welcome the opportunity to come, and I deeply regret that I can not come more frequently. Each of the few visits I have made have been most profitable to me personally, and has given me valuable light on my present duties.

The civilian as well as the military mind can readily appreciate the vital place which this college is destined to take in preparedness for war. And, even though I am ignorant of details, I feel justified in expressing the hope that it will soon be found practicable to lengthen and thus make the course of instruction even more thorough and complete. I feel also that a policy should be inaugurated of sending more of the graduates of this college immediately to the Army War College, to G-4 of the General Staff and - vice versa - of sending to this college graduates of the War College and officers having completed a tour in G-4. It is obvious that such a policy would very soon give us more common understanding of the complicated military and procurement problems of supplying the enormous forces required in a great emergency.

With so much by way of preface, it would seem appropriate that what I say should be directed primarily to those questions in which the Office of the Assistant Secretary and G-4 have a similar, or better a more or less overlapping, interest.

However, it would first appear desirable to recall a few things concerning the General Staff. Few, if any, organizations take final shape from the beginning. So it is not surprising that our first steps, taken in 1901, toward a General Staff were hesitant and faltering. Nor is it surprising that, notwithstanding the high attainments of most its members, our pre-war General Staff was a name rather than a living thing. Necessarily then there were innumerable mistakes and changes in organization throughout the World War. But as a result of the experience of the World War the simple basic principles became obvious and there can be no question as to the fundamental soundness of the present General Staff organization. Minor changes and developments may of course be expected, and doubtless some may now be desirable. No change in the foundations of our present General Staff system can, however, be anticipated even in

the remote future. The basic principles are:- No one man can personally exercise control in detail over the infinitely complex decisions which must necessarily be made by the command in modern war. The function of the General Staff is to relieve the commander of these details and to facilitate the control of the commander. The true function of the General Staff is therefore purely a command function. The commander is interested in personnel; military intelligence; training and operations; supply. These four things, though interdependent, are clear cut and suggest the simple division of the General Staff into the four G's which we have adopted. But the plain lessons of the World War showed that something more was wanting. These lessons showed that the staff which plans a campaign should be the commander's agents in execution. In addition the World War clearly showed that no hastily brought together staff can at once function smoothly. As a consequence we have in the War Department General Staff a War Plans Division, intended to plan specific campaigns and to furnish the nucleus of the General Staff to take the field in the execution of such plans in the event of war.

It is of course the Supply Division of the General Staff which most frequently comes into contact with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War. Supply is vital to a commander; no commander can hope for success unless he and his General Staff give at least as much attention to supply as to all other military questions. This being so and procurement being the primary and indispensable first step in supply the question at once arises as to why questions of procurement should be separated from other matters of supply, taken away from the Supply Division of the General Staff and placed in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War. Particularly does this question arise since the several supply branches are responsible agencies, each in its own line, for procurement as well as for all other matters of supply; and since the distribution of supply supervision between the General Staff and the Office of the Assistant Secretary brings the supply branches under the supervision of two distinct agencies. To appreciate the reasons leading to the present set-up, required by law, it is necessary to return to the pre war and the World war periods. Before the World War we had no effective agency, either General Staff or other, for coordinating, or for the theoretical study of, supply questions. As far as the General Staff was concerned, our schools hardly made a pretense of paying the slightest attention to supply matters. The problem given at the service schools generally appeared to assume that God would be good to us and send manna from heaven. As a consequence it is not surprising that, in spite of earnest effort on the part of individual officers of certain supply branches and of the tardy convening of super councils and boards, we entered the World War with a less conception of supply than of any other question. Nor is it surprising that change after change took place in that part of the War Department General Staff charged with supply, that more and more actual power was taken from the General Staff and the supply branches and vested in various boards and dollar-a year men. It has been said,

perhaps with some shadow of truth, that a number of high-ranking officers in the War Department became in effect messenger boys to various boards and dollar a year men. It is hardly too much to say that the problem never reached the verge of solution, for when quantity production was eventually reached, storage and distribution had reached such congestion that consideration of what was on top of the pile had as much to do as requirements in making up overseas cargoes. Hundreds of millions upon hundreds of millions were sunk in the purchase of things in excess of requirements while some minor question delayed production of vital necessities. In thus trying to present the obverse, but true side, of the picture usually given of supply matters in America during the war, I hope that my purpose will not be misunderstood. I am not criticizing individuals or personalities. I am criticizing thesystem or lack of system which brought about delay, confusion, and waste. The greater portion of this criticism should be borne by the Regular Officer, who steadfastly shut his eyes to the vast problem of supply. It is doubtful if we had on April 6, 1917, one single officer who fully appreciated the necessity for the coordination of economic and military policy in modern war on a great scale. Certainly we had no group of officers trained and equipped to grasp and solve even a tithe of the industrial and business problems which had to be met. But most of us came out of the war with a full realization that there is an economic and business side as well as a purely military side of modern war. We realize that there is a strategy of raw materials as well as of giving or declining battle. We were convinced, and the Congress realized, that we must prepare this economic and business side in time of peace.

Such is my conception of the background which led the Congress to take from the General Staff the duty of supervising Procurement and assigning that duty to the Assistant Secretary; who presumably will always be a business man. Whether this solution is the best which might be reached is a matter of opinion and is theoretical. That the present solution is workable is evidenced by the uninterrupted progress that has been made in all supply planning and particularly in the matters of requirements and procurement. We have at least some idea of what we shall need in war and where we can get it; that is something we have never before had in all the years of the country's existence.

It is not necessary to suppose a specific case, to raise the question as to the possibility of a conflict between the so-called military view and the procurement, or munitions, necessities or policy. The Congress attempted to provide means for adjusting any such divergent views by creating the War Council in which the Chief of Staff and the Assistant Secretary present specific matters of policy for the decision of the Secretary of War. In reality then the supply branches are not actually serving two masters, as some infer, but each supply branch like all the

rest of us serves the ultimate commander. Nevertheless, we must have a clear conception of the line of demarkation between the supply functions of the Office of the Assistant Secretary and those of the General Staff else theoretical clarity becomes practical confusion. While G.O. 41, of 1921 and later orders indicate those functions pertaining to the Office of the Assistant Secretary and those pertaining to the General Staff, a clear conception can only be gained by some analysis of the whole problem. In the interest of brevity I will, however, attempt to confine such analysis to a very few of the more important points

a. Supply is based on the needs of troops and the determination of types and quantities is therefore purely a command, that is General Staff, function.

b. Production, including inspection of facilities, contracts, acquisition, delivery, and storage at point of delivery are purely business and production matters and under the law pertain to the Office of the Assistant Secretary.

c. Once the supplies are secured, the location of depots, movement to bases and to troops, priorities, issues, and all matters connected therewith become matters concerning the General Staff.

These three principles are simple and can hardly be questioned. Properly interpreted these three principles of themselves solve all serious questions as to the responsible authority. It is, however, equally fundamental, or rather there is a principle of universal application necessarily taking priority over the three mentioned -- in the vernacular this first principle is - There can be no such thing as a successful organization built up of "water-tight compartments". Cooperation is essential in the solution of all problems and in all military organization there must be a sort of twilight zone in which it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly just what agency is primarily concerned. For example, it is surely a command, General Staff, function to determine types of equipment. But it is conceivable that a desirable type can not be produced as a practical proposition, and it is more conceivable that a desirable type can not be produced in sufficient quantity. Manifestly the Office of the Assistant Secretary is deeply concerned and must be consulted in the adoption of types. It is, however, quite conceivable that the military view would accept a limited production of a particular type rather than a very much larger production of an inferior type. But this is not the limit of the General Staff interest in production. In modern war on a great scale no plan is worth the paper it is written on unless it takes into consideration supply - which reaches back to knowledge of production to be expected. Take again the principle that the movement of supplies and their distribution to troops is a pure function of command. This is a simple indusputable principle but in its application it involves control of transportation and we shall be fortunate indeed if our transportation facili-

ties function so perfectly that no questions of priority can arise as to transportation essential to production and that essential to the delivery and distribution of supplies to troops. Perhaps even more fundamental than anything I have said - Demand in modern war is always far in excess of supply. The Office of the Assistant Secretary must therefore constantly demand that the General Staff indicate priorities even in production. If the General Staff shirks this responsibility confusion is inevitable and the fault is not one of production.

It is certainly not necessary to invite the attention of any one of this body to the fact that quantity production can not begin on M Day and to the consequent necessity for maintaining reserves adequate for the more essential needs. You are doubtless familiar with the present policy of maintaining reserves of essential items sufficient for one million men; a policy indirectly sanctioned by the Congress. Your work here has brought you in touch with requirements curves, production curves and the rest of the technique of determining the quantity of any essential item which must be maintained in peace. I assume that most of you at any rate are familiar with the fact that G-4 has recommended items and quantities far below those advocated by the branches and by the other G's, and that as a consequence we may be said to be very close to bedrock in our lists of essential items for one million men. But the point I wish to emphasize, whether you are familiar with it or not, is that we have not got reserves of balanced essential items for one million men. In some essential items our stock is zero or precious near to it. And the worst is yet to come - due to deterioration, obsolescence, and other causes the stocks we have are constantly deteriorating; in some cases this deterioration is startlingly rapid. The cause is simple; we are not getting money to maintain our stocks; worse than that - we are day by day eating up our fat. Under the present stress for economy and with our already inadequate personnel it is easy to see the reason for putting our money to the current day's task. But the gravest dangers attend a long continued neglect of our war reserves. There are certainly two sides to the question, already engaged, and which may be fitly characterized as materiel versus personnel. It is a question which should be constantly before all of us for, in my judgment, reaching an early solution is second in importance to no other question we have or are likely to have. It is hopeless to expect that a complete solution can be found in an immediate enormous increase in appropriations. Hence we must look for at least a partial solution along the lines of reducing the number of men for whom reserves are maintained and of finding substitutes which can be obtained commercially on M Day. Reduction in number of men for whom reserves are maintained is a most serious step since it means a corresponding reduction for at least 18 months in the number of men we can keep on the fighting line. The decision involved in this step is of course a General Staff matter. However, you gentlemen can palliate the evils of that step if you can find some means of

duction. I should like to emphasize the last thought: -- even though such early speeding up be at the cost of delay in reaching what may be termed ultimate quantity production. I hope you will pardon my seeming criticism when I say - that I feel that you have given more attention to the goal of final quantity production than to increasing the early output. We are making the same mistake along other lines - it is hardly too much to say that, deluded by our experience in the last war, we are looking at the end or at best the middle of a future war and are forgetting that next time we may have to be in at the beginning as well as at the end - we not only may not but probably will not have allies to hold the line and supply us with munitions while we are getting ready.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary, the Supply Branches, and the General Staff have a mutual interest in the question of substitutes. We should make a continual effort to find substitutes which can be got commercially on M Day. If at any time we can find a substitute and thus eliminate another so-called essential item we render the more probable the maintenance of other essential items.

I could talk all day on this one question of War Reserves but I will abstain after one more thought - War Reserves are far more of a theory at present than a reality; it behooves us to make them a reality even if on a reduced scale - Your guns can't shoot theoretical paper ammunition at H Hour on D Day.

We frequently hear, in war and in peace, criticisms of the General Staff on account of change of plan. Doubtless this criticism is sometimes warranted but - aside from the fact that even a General Staff plan may be so rotten that any change must improve it - I wish to invite attention to the most fundamental of principles:- No plan whatsoever will succeed in war unless it be flexible and simple. And this is the more true as complexity in means increase. The result must be simple even if the approach to it involves methods and reasoning as abstruse as those involved in Einstein's theory. I quite realize that putting into effect a production plan requires a long period of time and I think I have a good idea of the upsetting effect on production of any change in demands. We can readily agree that no demand for change, especially as to type, should be made except under the urge of absolute necessity. But, since the enemy will utilize all the resources of industrial progress, even more rapid in war than in peace, and since no man can foretell the developments of the next war, these demands are inevitable. (If you are not convinced of the truth of this read the ammunition crisis in England in 1915 and 1916). Production plans must then be simple and flexible to meet changed demands, if for no other reason.

I apologize for the time I have taken. I fully appreciate the fact that I have offered nothing new - but I am so convinced of the importance of giving careful consideration to these matters that I feel that any apologies due you are for the manner of presentation and not for the subjects touched upon.