THE ARMY INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE

WASHINGTON, D. C.

GRADUATION EXERCISES.

Addresses by

Major General George S. Gibbs,
Chief Signal Officer.

Colonel W. P. Wooten, C.E.
Director, Army Industrial College.

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Remarks - Colonel W. P. Wooten, C. E.,
Director, Army Industrial College
Introducing Major General George S. Gibbs, Chief Signal Officer.

Mr. Secretary, General Summerall, Distinguished Guests, Gentlemen of the Army Industrial College

Today marks the close of the 1928-1929 year of the Army Industrial College and the completion of your ten months course. As you are aware, the purpose of this course has been to train you for the duties of procurement which may fall upon you in time of emergency - duties of extreme importance which, if not properly performed, will cause our troops in time of war to work under a very serious handicap.

It is a pleasure to express to you the gratification which the members of the Faculty of the Industrial College feel at the way in which you have conducted yourselves during this course. You have shown an extreme interest and the work which you have done has been of a high degree of excellence. I want to congratulate you upon the manner in which you have performed your duties.

Today as a final address to the class we will have a talk by General Gibbs, Chief Signal Officer of the Army.

Address of Major General George S. Gibbs,
Chief Signal Officer.

The tremendous effort of America in meeting the demands of the World War in military supply gave rise to a number of conceptions of supply organization that never have been fully analyzed and digested. It became the fashion, for one thing, to talk of storage and issue as a military function, and procurement as a business function The implication has been fostered that there is a wide separation between these functions, that they can be carried on quite independent of each other.

Under the system that has been set up in the War Department the supervision and control and sufficiency of procurement is made a responsibility of the Assistant Secretary of War, while storage and issue is a responsibility that heads up to the Chief of Staff.

As a matter of fact, in a broad sense every phase of military supply is a military function and has a direct bearing on the final result of military operations. The idea of separation should, therefore, not be emphasized. On the contrary, the dependent relations of each phase of supply from the very beginning to the very end should be studied with the aim of connecting them up into a harmonious, effective and responsible chain.

This does not mean that the present assignment of responsibilities is either illogical or ineffective. There always

must be division of labor in all enterprises of great magnitude. The division that has been made in our present system follows natural lines and should prove entirely workable provided there is no rift in the actual chain of supply.

There is a fundamental difference between military supply and commercial supply that can never be reconciled. Commercial supply, while it is based primarily upon the meeting of commercial needs, is governed absolutely by the necessity of making it pay. Neither production nor distribution is, or can be, undertaken without making a profit, and much of it is conducted largely for the purpose of making money.

If a store dealing in a particular line cannot buy a certain article so that it can be sold at a profit, the stock may be temporarily out of that article and no great harm is done. Certainly the business is not liable to be ruined.

On the other hand, military supply requires the certain and complete assemblage of groups of articles necessarily required for the performance of definite functional duties. A failure of either the certainty or completeness of the assemblage means failure of the duty and results in military disaster Suppose a soldier at the front has a gun and no ammunition, a telephone and no battery, timbers for a bridge and no hardware. These are illustrations in point that can readily be understood.

Suppose that these functional assemblages are disregarded, that military supplies are handled in commodity groups in

accordance with the basic materials from which they are made, chisels and tools for surgeons, dentists, carpenters, stone masons and plumbers are handled by a ferrous-metals section, that wash bowls, telephone insulators and false teeth are handled by a porcelain and pottery section, that bridge timbers, telephone cross arms, medical splints and spokes for caisson wheels are handled by a timber products section. It should be obvious, and it is true, that there would be no possibility of getting together, in the hands of a soldier or unit of soldiers in the field at the time required, all of the articles required for the performance of any functional duty.

What I am trying to point out is that successful military supply requires a set-up that maintains an unbroken chain of responsibility for assemblage and supply from the source to the final user.

There is an academic appeal and attractiveness to the argument of those who would apply the principles of commodity procurement and storage and issue to the military establishment. In your studies at this school you may have reviewed the effort that was made along that line just about the time the armistice came in 1918, and its consequences.

The whole object of supply in war is to enable the soldier to impose his will on the enemy That is the test of the correctness and efficiency of everything that concerns military

supply, - its organization, its methods and its results.

It should be recognized that each general category of supply has characteristics and problems that are peculiar to itself. The procurement of coal and gasoline is not like the procurement of guns and ammunition. The procurement of radio equipment is not like the procurement of medicines.

These illustrations are intended to point out that a supply system must have a flexibility that recognizes and provides for these differences.

Finally, there is the psychological side to the supply business. No enterprise can become so great as to become impersonal, and reach a high state of efficiency. The most powerful incentive to human effort (and we expect superhuman effort in war), is interest, personal interest and collective interest. In the regiment and in the division we call it esprit de corps.

This,then, is another reason why the organization of supply along functional lines, with unbroken chains of responsibility and with all the pride and obligation of organization spirit, is logical and best calculated to satisfy military needs.

Now, where do we go from here? That is, where do you go from here? Where do the graduates of this college fit into the scheme of things?

To those of you who become prosaic cogs in the machinery of current procurement, the course you have pursued here will give you a broader view of the things you are dealing with - their sources and

their relationship to other articles. You will recognize a critical item and a serious problem when you meet it face to face. You will see more things to be done than you saw before.

Procurement planning for war will have to go on indefinitely. You have learned here much of what has to be done, and how to do it. I have noticed that as this work goes on, and as officers get a better understanding of it, the big problems become clearer, and a great many of the little ones cease to be problems at all.

Wonderful progress has been made in procurement planning, and I doubt if citizens generally or even many of the Army know how much has been done.

Your heavy thinking, however, should be directed toward the parts that you are going to play when war calls into action the full functions of the Office of The Assistant Secretary of War, and revives those super-agencies required for the control and coordination of the basic resources of the nation.

The Supply Services are better organized than ever before in our history. Their procurement machinery is well set up and can be expanded easily to meet the strain of war. They are going to need essential help, however, the very help that the Office of The Assistant Secretary of War is organizing to provide, - supervision of methods, coordination in the allotment of critical materials and services, representation in the division of resources between the fighting forces and the civil population, contact with

the super-agencies that may be set up, and diplomatic or other measures necessary to obtain critical articles from foreign sources.

The building of an organization to perform those duties in time of war is a very considerable task. If, in your course at this college, you have formulated a picture of that organization and those duties, you have done a good job. It is logical to expect that the key men in that organization will come from the graduates of this school.

Likewise, it is reasonable to expect that many of the most valuable men in the super-agencies will be products of the same training. This ought to be true in order to preserve that continuity of purpose of which I have already spoken.

Men who have an understanding of military needs will go far toward guiding actions that will assure those needs and at the same time prevent actions that are ill-considered or extravagant or unnecessary.

Right here let me say that if this school does not make a study of what super-agencies are needed in war, and what their organization and functions should be, I do not know where else it will be done at all in advance of the emergency.

I commend these thoughts to your continued study, wherever you may go, and congratulate you most heartily upon your completion of this important phase of a work that has such boundless possibilities.