

THE KNOX ALUMNUS

Volume 1

February, 1918

Number 3

ORDNANCE IS KEYSTONE OF WAR SITUATION

Distinguished Son of Knox Tells of His Observations in Europe and Why America Must Win This War

By S. S. McCLURE, '82

I shall tell you how Germany went to war at the beginning; how France saved the war at the beginning and how England averted the greatest tragedy in English history.

During the first two years of the war—when I was in Belgium and Germany, I had some interesting talks with Gen. Von Bissing and a very nice young man who was my constant companion. When one is traveling in those countries during war times, a German officer is always your constant companion and in the course of our talks he told me why Von Moltke, the chief of the great general staff, was removed at the beginning of the war. He was removed at the beginning of the war because in preparing for war the great general staff had made a mistake in regard to the amount of munitions and equipment used in modern warfare, and the German supplies at the beginning of the war—Germany expected the war to last less than six months and to finish in two or three months—were exhausted in two months. And he further told me—and I learned the same thing from others in Belgium, and Lord Northcliffe learned the same thing from other sources—that the Germans at the battle of the Marne found the reserve of munitions so low in Germany they were unable to go on and finish their great plan of campaign by which they had expected to win the war in France within six weeks or two months, compel France to make peace and then send her army across Germany and finish with Russia. That is what the Kaiser had in mind when he said the war would be over before the leaves fell in Autumn.

The German plan which I got from these

Remarks by Mr. McClure at the weekly meeting of the Chicago Chapter of the Four Minute Men, January 14, as reported by Philip S. Post, '87, especially for THE ALUMNUS.

men was this: Germany put a very small part of her military forces on the Franco-Prussian frontier—just a screen to keep France from invading Germany—and France later occupied a part of Alsace-Lorraine. Then, she was to send her great mass of troops through Belgium, sweep around Belgium and Luxemburg, make an encircling movement and go on until she had completed the circle where Switzerland borders Germany. But after the Battle of the Marne she was unable to go on, on account of the risk taken in the smallness of her munitions, so that Germany really failed in the beginning of this war in what we call the ordnance department.

The reason that France, with seventy per cent. of her iron mines, ninety per cent. of all her iron ore and one-third of her factories in the hands of the Germans, was able to hold the Germans back is because the French are the masters of artillery in warfare—they have always been the leaders in modern artillery—and the French in their ordnance department proved their superiority by holding the German armies back.

England was under the shadow of a great tragedy of a world disaster when she was unable to furnish her troops with proper munitions and equipment. And when the story comes to be well known, that first hundred thousand English youths—probably the best hundred thousand at that time in all England—how these hundred thousand with a courage never before equalled—not for a few hours like the three hundred at Thermopylæ, or the three days at Gettysburg, but month after month,—held back the Germans; it will go down in history as one of the greatest stories in bravery.

England came to a point where she was in danger in the matter of munitions and equip-

ment. Then she picked out the man who had been picked out for ten years for any very difficult job—Lloyd George—made him minister of munitions, then she centered all the conduct of war upon that one department. Lloyd George sent for the ablest organizing man in all England—Sir Eric Geddes.

Sir Eric Geddes said: "Well, I can get things done, but I don't know anything about making shells."

Sir Lloyd George said: "That doesn't matter, you get things done."

I was talking with some of the men in the munitions factories in Birmingham—not the officials; they were superintendents, foremen, etc. They said to me that anybody could have done as Lloyd George did, a child could have done as much; all he did was to get the ablest man in the Empire and have him carry on this work. "It isn't Lloyd George" they said. Then I quoted the first two words in a line from Shakespeare. You will recall that in the "Merchant of Venice" the Prince of Morocco said, when he opened the wrong casket: "Oh, Hell!" I said, "Oh, Hell!" quoting Shakespeare, "that is all anybody has got to do."

On the Somme front, Sir Eric Geddes had organized a transportation system that a great American railroad expert says has never been equalled in the world. Sir Eric Geddes has gone on and is now head of the British Navy.

There you see how Germany lost the war in the ordnance department, how France held back that marvelous military equipment of Germany by her superior generalship in artillery, and how England averted the greatest disaster in all English history, in all history of the British Empire, by putting in charge of that very same department the ablest man they had, who then turned around, "just as any child could have done," and turned over the job to the biggest man in the Empire.

Now, the thing we want more than anything else in the world, is to win this war. America is the keystone of all the forces that will win this war. The ordnance department is the keystone of America's power for the winning of this war—and this war we have got to win.

There were eight McClures who volunteered in the Civil War and six were taken. As any man would say, I would rather go into this war than send my son. I say that, but I would rather now that my boys never came back than

that we failed in this matter, and I speak for a hundred million.

And I say it with a kind of heartbreak and agony we all more or less feel that we will greatly win or greatly lose in this war—just where Germany lost in the beginning, just where France saved civilization during the first few months and just where England took hold and did those things in that particular department of military activity and in civil and industrial life.

This war differs from all other wars in that victory can be achieved only by killing. In this war, you cannot surround and capture enemies, you cannot occupy the enemy's territory and bring about peace but whichever side is the best equipped and has the best morale that side will win the war.

Eternity's Stair

I have not long to live;
How shall I spend my days?
How shall I choose from out life's maze
The profitable ways?

If I could take my toll of wealth
Would I but fear to lose it?
If I could gain my meed of power
Would I have time to use it?
If fame or high command were mine
Would I be wise to choose it?

The rill runs to the sea;
The leaf shines in the sun;
The earth is full of flowers and bees—
Of these I am but one.
If a sweet flowery glade is mine
I must not then abuse it.
If a contented hive is mine
I must not then confuse it.
No. I must love, and work, and give.
Who saves his life must lose it.

—J. G. Needham, '91.

Ranging in age from 2 to 84, the Arnold family gathered at the Ray M. Arnold home in Galesburg Christmas day for a family reunion. Twenty-eight Arnolds were there.