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The Gold Barrage

Your top sergeant let you hear of every little mistake you made in the World War! But nobody heretofore has told you of the mistakes the big boys made. Mistakes so colossal that they won the war because Germany was just plumb discouraged when she saw we could pay for 'em and dig down for more. Here are some choice war secrets, told to Mr. Shepherd by a man who pulled the strings

by

William G. Shepherd

IN a certain little room in the Capitol building at Washington six senators sat daily and fought the war-behind-the-scenes of the Washington sector. They were Senators Martin of Virginia, Shafroth of Colorado, Hardwick of Georgia, Warren of Wyoming, Smoot of Utah and Underwood of Alabama.

The late Oscar W. Underwood once told me about that little room and what went on in it. This is the first time that its secrets have been revealed.

"I sometimes think," he told me, "as I look back upon those days, that one smart enemy spy at our keyhole would have been a good thing. It would have justified the enemy in ending the war sooner, to hear of the billions in credit we had to spend. Yet there was another side to it. We were all guessing. But so were the army and navy heads who came to us with their plans. None of us knew much about the war. One day an officer came in and asked for a million dollars for the army secret service. 'We shall have to spend a large sum for agents,' he said.

"'Agents,' exclaimed Senator Shafroth. 'What do you intend to do with agents?'

"'Why, we must send a good many of them to Germany!'

"'To Germany,' exclaimed Shafroth. 'My God, man, don't you know that if you send agents to Germany they'll be arrested and put in jail? We're at war with Germany!'

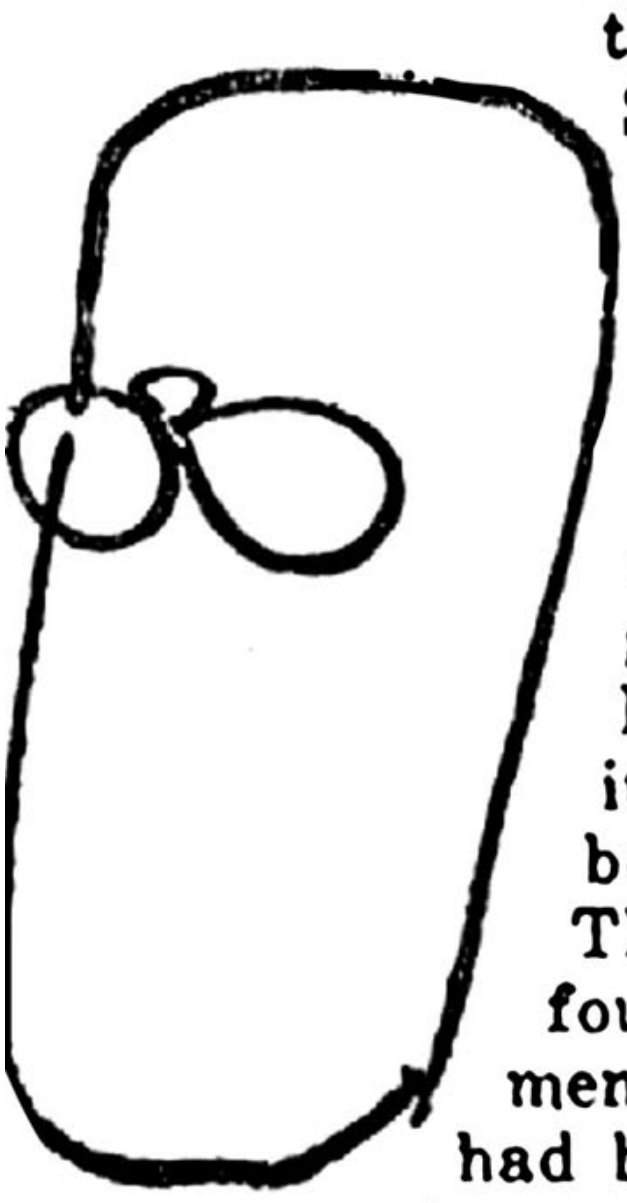
"'Senator,' the officer explained gently, 'they'll not only be arrested in Germany if they are caught. They'll be shot. Perhaps it will make things clearer if I tell you that "agents" are sometimes called "spies." He's an agent when he's your man; he's a spy when he's the other fellow's man.'

"'Isn't there some way, Colonel,' asked Shafroth, throwing up his hands, 'for a mighty nation liks ours to fight a war without spies?'

American Mistakes

"It took the colonel twenty minutes to explain to Shafroth that one spy, securing advance information, might possibly save the lives of thousands of men. Then Shafroth voted with us to give the colonel his million.

"It's only fair, after I've used a senator as an example of how little civilians knew about the war, also to show you how little the general staff of the War Department knew about it. Civilians—the draft boards—raised the army. Then to our amazement we found that the War Department, the general staff of which had been in existence since the days of Roosevelt, had not fixed upon a single camp site or training field in the United States. You'd have thought, after the army's disastrous experience in the Spanish-American War with miserable, disease-ridden camps, that the last thing the general staff would have neglected would be the selection of camp sites. But they had, and now they were forced to rush General Leonard Wood all over the country selecting sites.



Woodrow Wilson

"One of the first things we did was to grant a sum of one hundred million dollars to be spent by President Wilson at his own discretion. This encouraged other officials to ask for huge blind sums for their departments. I remember a rebuff given to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, who wanted $50,000,000 but finally was willing to take only $5,000,000. However, blind appropriations ended with that to the President

When Time Meant Lives

"This ability of ours to draw upon great credit sometimes blinded us to the value of time. Even President Wilson himself, with his vast knowledge, made one big mistake of that kind:

"We appropriated at first six hundred million for airplanes. What we should have done was to send off for blue prints of the war planes which our Allies were making, and set to work to produce them in American factories. But for some reason President Wilson got it into his head that our Allies' planes weren't good enough. He insisted that we create a new war plane, new from wing to engine. He imposed this enormous task upon an amazingly able group of experts. But, meantime, we might have been building thousands of the planes devised by our Allies, which were good

planes, built on a basis of war experience and constantly improving.

"Consequently, we spent hundreds of millions—which *wasn't* the main thing—and almost a year and a half—which *was* the main thing—devising an airplane which never reached the front.

"When we went into the war we had no plants for taking nitrogen from the air and there was a time when one third of all our ships—sorely needed elsewhere—were devoted to carrying nitrate from Chile for gunpowder. That's why we built the dam at Muscle Shoals, and the nitrogen-making plant.

"We built a whole town for the manufacture of poison gases and in the fall of 1918 we had an enormous supply of the deadliest of gases ready to ship. But practically none of it ever reached the front. Too late. Then, because that gas was so deadly and so useless in times of peace, we had to appropriate many more thousands of dollars to have the whole lot *taken out into mid-Atlantic* and sunk.

"And now, the matter of these doughboys who trained and trained—and trained, but never got to France. The war ended with them still training—experts at bayonet practice, gunnery, drills, poison-gas routine and all the rest, as finished soldiers as any nation on either side could show. Here's how that happened. It was another mistake in the time element.

"We didn't have enough ships to move all our own troops, and Great Britain needed her ships for carrying food. Herbert Hoover said England was only eight weeks distant from starvation at any one time.

"The Battle of Amiens, in the spring of 1918, changed the situation. The enemy broke through and it looked as if the Channel ports were about to fall into his hands, separating France and England. It was then Haig announced, 'We are fighting with our backs to the wall.' The British were desperately frightened and turned a great fleet of erstwhile food ships toward the United States. With my own eyes I saw ninety-six British ships in the roadway at Norfolk. We had to fill those ships with American troops as quickly as possible, for they had to get back to food-carrying or Britain would be starved.

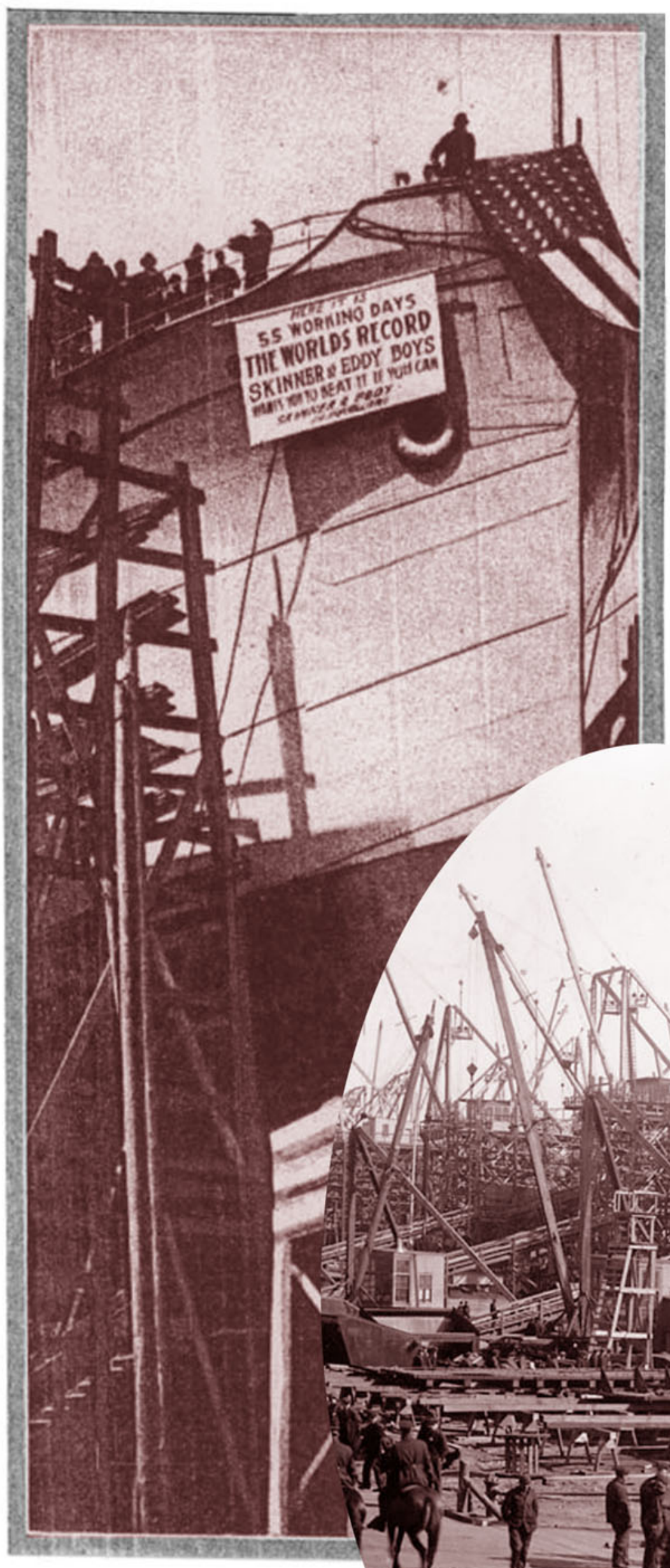
The Price of Ships

"We didn't have time to send off to Texas or other interior points for

soldiers who had been training for long months. We didn't have railroad facilities to face such a crisis. Every hour was precious. So the soldiers, trained or untrained, nearest the seaboard were piled into those food ships.

"We had to take steps to correct that situation. Ships were the only means. Our government decided to build its own ships, believing that the price of $80 a ton offered by the United States Steel Corporation was too high. Well, we had first to build yards, towns, plumbing, lighting, pavements, all living conveniences and facilities for thousands of employees. At last we got to the actual building of the ships. When we got through, the ships had cost us—-not $80—but from $250 to $300 a ton!

"There are mighty fleets of those ships rusting away today in the Potomac and Hudson Rivers. There they are, aces we never had to use because the other fellow knew we had 'em, and gave up the game. But if we hadn't had 'em—"



The U. S. government shipbuilding yards at Hog Island at the height of war-time activity

This 8,800-ton steel ship was built and launched in 55 days for a new record in Seattle, in 1917