

OUR NAVY AND THE NEXT WAR

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Our navy and the next war by Robert Wilden Neeser

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ROBERT WILDEN NEESER

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THE NEXT WAR**

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BY
ROBERT WILDEN NEESER

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1915

PREFACE

IF ever the navy of the United States needed the intelligent support of the American people, it is at the present moment. And it is fortunate that interest is now growing, and that a disposition on the part of our citizens to force action toward the meeting of the needs of the service is beginning to show itself.

On one point there seems to be no difference of opinion—that if we are to have a navy at all, it should be as efficient as it possibly can be made. We have to-day individual ships that are the admiration of foreign naval architects. We have officers and men on board of them that we believe are the equal of those in any other service. We have certain materials of war that are as good as those manufactured for other fleets. But what we have not appreciated is that efficient individual ships and efficient crews do not alone make a powerful navy. These units must be welded into an efficient whole by an organization and administration which co-ordinate their capabilities and direct their efforts toward a common end.

In building up our navy, the public mind has been centred too much on the power of the single ship. It has taken no account of all the various accessories essential to the maintenance of the fleet.

In a recent article on the British navy, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford said: "We have had no naval war that threatened our existence for over a century. But if such a war had occurred any time in the last forty years preceding the creation of a war staff, our disorganization would have been complete. How in those years the navy ever carried out its duties without a war staff is a marvel; it could only have been done by the superb loyalty of those afloat, who have always done their best and never allowed the word 'impossible' to exist. The Beresford committee of 1909 proved up to the hilt the unreadiness of the fleet if a sudden war had been declared. The creation of a war staff (as a result of the investigation) has removed this danger."

In that same year, 1909, the President of the United States appointed a commission to consider the state of our own navy. The report of that board is strikingly similar to that of the Beresford committee. It revealed a condition that astounded even the service. But it accomplished nothing. For Congress refused to supply the remedy.

Fortunately the superb loyalty of our own officers and men, who "have always done their best and never allowed the word 'impossible' to exist," enabled our ships to carry on their work since then in a way that has, on many occasions, won the praise of foreign experts. In the face of a policy that threatened the very existence of the service, in spite of an unbalanced battle fleet, in spite of a serious shortage in its personnel, in the face of every discouragement, our officers and men have striven, and are still striving, for efficiency. But this goal will not be reached, nor even closely approached, until the doctrine is thoroughly understood that there must be an intelligent comprehension on the part of the government of the purpose for which a navy exists. The people through their representatives—that is, the government—must encourage further the navy's legitimate efforts and fill its unquestioned military needs. They must develop a policy, free from any taint of partisan politics, that will secure the development of the navy in harmony with the purpose for which it exists. They must demand of the navy a policy, for which officers of the navy should be held to strict accountability, and must secure with equal loyalty plans in support of that policy.

Shall we continue to neglect our military needs and withhold that support which alone can supply

the dynamic force that will make of the fleet an efficient instrument capable of fulfilling the purpose for which it exists?

ROBERT W. NEESER.

NEW YORK, March 1, 1915.

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