

Man of Direct Action Howe Gets Things Done

By GEORGE H. LYON

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THE man who builds the guns and armored cars and airplanes and ships for Canada is big, lean, hard Clarence Decatur Howe. He was born in Waltham, Mass., of American parents, 55 years ago, went to American public schools and was graduated from Mass. Institute of Technology. He went to Canada as a consulting engineer in 1905 and taught civil engineering at Dalhousie university in Halifax. In the years that followed he became the best-known builder of grain elevators in the world. As Mr. Mackenzie King's minister of transport he built Canada's great transcontinental airlines and with the coming of war he became minister of munitions and supply—opposite number to America's Bill Knudsen.

A member of the government told me this story about Mr. Howe, which, I think, is characteristic of his methods. He himself denied the story but I suspect the denial was prompted largely by modesty. The story was that when the British, after Dunkirk, notified Canada that it could supply no more training planes for the commonwealth air training plan, Mr. Howe immediately flew to New York and Washington to see if he could buy American trainers. A number of these proved to be available but money was needed at once to close the deal. And Mr. Howe had no money. He whipped out a fountain pen and personally signed a cheque for \$8,000,000, the story goes and then flew post-haste back to Canada to make sure the cheque didn't bounce.

Now, I can't prove that story but it is exactly the kind of thing Mr. Howe would do. He believes in taking long chances in an emergency and will try anything once. He is a friendly, incurable optimist, although he did promise Commons with a grin after a government airplane building project had gone wrong in the early stages that he'd "never make any more optimistic promises."

MR. HOWE essentially is a man of direct action. When the last of the Chamberlain industrialists were still trying to keep the war industries in England, fearful that Canadian rivals might build up formidable competition, he sailed on the Western Prince for Europe, determined that he would bring back the blue prints and specifications for war material Canada so badly needed. The Western Prince was torpedoed with a great loss of life in mid-Atlantic and Mr. Howe spent two days in a drifting lifeboat, many of whose passengers were near death when rescued. He paused in Scotland only long enough to get warm and dry and hurried on to London. His friends say he considers this a minor episode in his life. What was important was that he got most of the blue-prints he wanted, although, as he told me later in Ottawa, he never yet has been able to get complete specifications for the building of a "corvette," the 150-foot baby destroyer which has proved so valuable in naval patrol.

THE greater part of Mr. Howe's job, he said, is to find the bad spots in Canada's industrial war effort and take care of them. "Ninety per cent of the program," he said, "is going well. There are a lot of people, of course, who have nothing to do but find fault."

He thought Bill Knudsen was a "very good man for the job" and that designs for war material which Canada now has, should save the

U.S. a great deal of time. "Production of airplanes," he said, "has been our worst headache, although I'm not ashamed of the record now that we have more than 40 ships coming off the line weekly. We've done a good job with the universal carrier (an armored caterpillar carrier of troops and supplies, capable of making 45 miles an hour). The things Canada had the facilities for doing, I think she's done rather well. With our experience in the last war we knew, of course, how to make shells and ammunition. That's been a very bright spot in the picture."

He said also that he was proud of the job that had been done on gun production, particularly the manufacture of Bren light machine-guns which are now being turned out in tremendous quantities and used by the British on every fighting front. This also was true, he added, of the production of chemicals and aluminum.

"PERHAPS we should be doing more of this," he said, "making the things we make best. However, the munitions program as a whole is well ahead of schedule. We have made sure that profits on war work are slender. We have placed war industries only where we were sure they should go, having due regard for the available population and alternative employment. We tried not to dislocate populations too greatly. Naturally, some people have been offended."

"This year we expect to ship overseas or supply Canadian troops with munitions and supplies worth \$1,500,000,000. That represents 25 per cent of the national income. It has been organized in a little more than a year and isn't a bad program for a country of 11,000,000 people."

THE war industries progress to date:

Mechanical transport—More than 100,000 vehicles produced for transportation of troops, guns, munitions and equipment. Present production exceeds 400 a day, including new universal carriers.

New plant—\$300,000,000 program well under way.

Munitions—No bottleneck. Twelve calibres of ammunition in production, millions of rounds of small arms ammunitions daily, 350,000 large shells monthly. Two explosives plants in operation, eight more under construction.

Airplanes — **Bottleneck grows wider.** Present production of ships is 180 monthly, most of them trainers with surplus capacity used for fighters and bombers. Fifteen Hurricane fighters coming off the line weekly. Only supply of engines is from the U.S. Parachutes. 500 weekly.

Guns—14 types in production. One factory now producing 97,500 automatic firing guns, including Bren light machine-guns, a year. Second factory with output of 50,000 in operation next year. Machine-guns for air force in quantity production soon. Maximum output of anti-tank guns this autumn. Small type naval guns in production in August, large ones next year.

Tanks—Progress reported on production of Mark III medium tanks, but no real output yet. Production speeded by development of new alloy which permits welding of joints instead of riveting, making for speed and stronger joints.

Vessels—52 "corvettes" and 129 small craft produced for navy. Launching of first of 20 merchant vessels of 9,000 ton class due next year. Production of cargo vessels a bad bottleneck.

Machine-tools—Bought mostly in

U.S., but program for development of the industry in Canada now under way.

PRODUCTION of war materials in Canada, like other phases of the war effort, really didn't get under way until France fell and the Dominion was told by England that she was on her own. Now she is making many articles of war she never made before. It is an entirely different story from that of the last war when production was limited largely to shells. Peak production in all divisions will not be reached before next year but the record for the last 11 months offers ample proof that Canada's is an all-out war effort.

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