

In Case of War, Says Meyer, One Sea Battle Would Decide Nation's Fate



Head of National Department, Whose Theory It Is That the Navy Exists for the Purpose of the Fighting Fleet, Tells of Plans for Strengthening the Ocean Arm of America, and Gives His Ideas on Aeroplanes and Submarines.

By JAMES B. MORROW.

THE next war between the United States and a foreign country, experts say, will be settled by a single fight at sea—a tremendous battle of two modern fleets armed with the most terrible guns afloat and helped by submarines and torpedo boats.

If the war is with Japan the battle may be fought near the Hawaiian Islands or the Philippines. If it is with Germany, Italy or France the battle may be fought in the Caribbean Sea.

Ships of Europe, if they come from that direction, would have sailed three thousand miles. The distance from Yokohama to Honolulu is 3,445 miles. Steaming so far, the hostile fleet would need some repairs and a cleaning up before it would be ready for action. American scout ships, swift hounds of the ocean, would flash its progress by wireless to the American fleet in waiting.

The home fleet would try to attack the oncoming fleet before it had opportunity to prepare thoroughly for battle. A tired man is more easily whipped than is one who is rested. But war plans, like other plans worked out in advance, are not always possible of execution. The two fleets might meet on equal terms in the matter of preparation. There would be maneuvering for the advantage of time and position, and the battle would follow.

From the declaration of war onward, and even before the declaration, the two fleets would be looking for each other. All precedents of history are favorable to the nation that strikes first and strikes savagely. A first fight was never won by the man who simply blocked and ducked the other man's blows, unless the one was a giant and his assailant were a dwarf. A fight, if it is a fight, means a forward charge with every ounce of weight, and the heavier man or country wins, if he or it excels in skill and generalship.

FLYING TONS OF STEEL.

The two fleets would stand off at sea in the most frightful naval battle of history. The largest guns that were ever made for ships would be fired in broadsides simultaneously. Projectiles weighing 1,400 pounds would strike their targets five miles away at a velocity of about two thousand feet a second. Nearly three-fourths of a ton of hard steel, impelled by 365 pounds of powder and traveling about twenty-three miles a minute, is likely to damage anything it hits fairly. Meanwhile torpedoes, boats, low in the water, under cover of the lagging smoke from the guns and submarines, hidden from view like monsters of the deep, would dart forward to tear at the vitals of the mighty leviathans in the battle lines.

The battle would decide the war, in all probability. If the fleet of the United States were defeated, an invading army would land upon the Atlantic or the Pacific coast. No nation on earth, however, will attempt to send troops to this country until after its fleet has destroyed the fighting fleet of the United States. Japan, seven thousand miles away, would not dare to risk an army of transports unless the Pacific afforded it a safe means of approach. Nor would Germany embark an army of invasion unless the Atlantic were clear of the American fleet of battleships.

Hysterical members of Congress sometimes picture a horde of armed Japanese overrunning the country from Seattle to San Diego, or of armed Germans laying tribute from Bar Harbor to Palm Beach. They look across the ocean and almost see the onrushing swarm of foreign ships. Banks are to be robbed, stores are to be plundered and the inhabitants are to be put to the sword, so they say and may think. But they are illogical and ill-informed men. Occasionally—often, perhaps—they are juggling for votes and scare heads at home.

Ignorance, alarm and lame thinking have greatly increased the dangers from war that are supposed to menace the United States. The people of Los An-

geles may not know it, but they are exempt from naval attack, as are the people of any other undefended port, town or city on either coast. For instance, if a Japanese cruiser, in time of actual war, were to steam up to the very edge of Los Angeles not a shell could be fired at that city, and if coal and provisions were taken they would have to be paid for in money. Under the laws of war adopted by all civilized nations even a water city defended by sunken mines cannot be bombarded, pillaged or compelled to pay tribute to the enemy. New York or Boston would be safe, but the navy yard in Brooklyn or Charleston would be destroyed if it were not held and used temporarily.

Misconceptions pertaining to modern warfare are many. Jeopardies that are impossible in this country are discussed seriously. The plain military fact that the safety of the United States from foes beyond the oceans—yellow foes or white ones—rests absolutely on its fleet of battleships is hardly known to anybody or is muddled by talk about coast fortifications—many of which are said to be useless—and impracticable invasions.

"The navy," Secretary Meyer says, "exists for the purpose of the fighting fleet." His policy is to keep the fleet together. Auxiliary to the fleet are cruisers, torpedo boats, submarines, tugs and collers. But the navy is the fleet, and the fleet, good or bad, must defend the country against Japan, Germany or any other power that hurts American pride or encroaches upon its rights as a nation. And the fleet will fight as a whole, every available ship being present, and one great battle may decide the issue. If the American fleet is whipped the American people will have to make terms with the enemy. France lost Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in 1871 and paid an indemnity of one thousand million dollars.

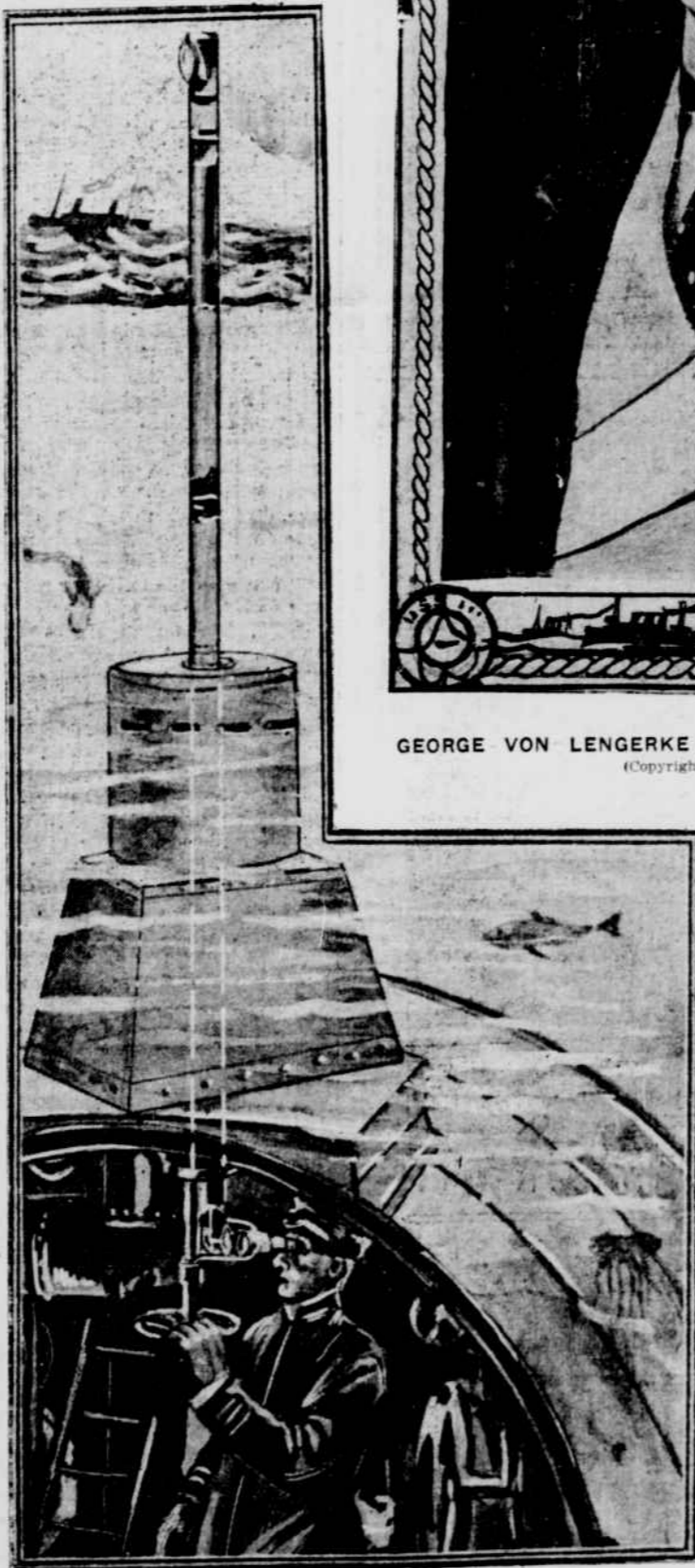
The navy yards are now modern ship-building and ship-repairing plants. Money is being saved on supplies. Vessels at sea are competing with one another in speed, coal consumption and other economies, as well as in target practice. Even the bookkeeping has been changed throughout the department—a trial balance can now be obtained, which, until recently, was never attempted in the navy. The first year he was in office Mr. Meyer cut the estimate for maintaining the naval establishment \$10,000,000. This year he made a further cut of \$5,000,000. In the mean time he has put his naval policy into the brief but sufficient phrase that "the navy exists for the purpose of the fighting fleet."

"In July of this year," Mr. Meyer said, in answer to an inquiry, "the fighting fleet of the navy will be twenty-one battleships and four armored cruisers. There will be four divisions of five ships each. The extra ship will carry the flag of the commander-in-chief. We plan to have four ships in each division ready at all times for active service. The fifth ship in every division will be in some navy yard for repairs. So we shall have seventeen fighting ships at the call of the country for any duty that may be required. Our purpose is to keep the fleet together and not to send vessels singly or in pairs over the earth on visits to foreign nations. The reason for maintaining the fleet intact is apparent."

"But all the vessels," I said, "are in the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific is unprotected, although war might come from that quarter."

NEED DUPLICATE FLEET.

"That is true. There should be a duplicate fleet in the Pacific. However, the fleet we have could be sent there in from sixty to ninety days. When the Panama Canal is completed the sailing distance between the coasts will be very much reduced. While our fleet is in the Atlantic Ocean, it is nevertheless a complete defence for the Pacific. We have fortifications and mines up and down the Western coast of the country. If war should occur with a nation, in Asia, let me say, by way of illustration, our fleet would be sent from one ocean to the



COMMANDER OF A SUBMARINE USING PERISCOPE TO SEE APPROACHING VESSELS.

other. The enemy would know that it was coming. He would not risk the loss of his own ships in attacking our cities, but would wait for our fleet, because a battle would be unavoidable and he would need every gun he had aboard. Therefore our fleet, although centered in the Atlantic Ocean, is a defence against an enemy from any direction.

"What is the cost of a Dreadnought and how long can it be kept in service without becoming obsolete?"

"The Delaware and the North Dakota, the latest ships we have, cost \$6,600,000 apiece, not including ammunition and supplies. War ships now cost about 40 per cent more than formerly by reason of the law of Congress enforcing an eight-hour day on all the constructive work done up to the time of launching. Outside yards can build a Dreadnought for \$1,000,000 less than it could be built by the government. The life of a ship—meaning its availability for service in the first line of battle—is ten years from the laying of its keel. Then it has ten years of life in the second battle line. At the end of twenty years, therefore, it becomes obsolete.

"The United States should build two battleships a year. There would then



GEORGE VON LENGERKE MEYER, SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.
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"On the other hand, no one country should have a navy larger or stronger than the combined navies of the other countries that are parties to the arbitration agreement. I think, therefore, that the United States and every great power will build and maintain fleets of fighting ships, no matter if peace is proclaimed throughout the world or not. Great Britain will spend \$197,000,000 on its navy this year. Germany will spend \$194,300,000 and France \$74,300,000.

with a navy double the size of our own, has but six. I have recommended, consequently, that the old yards at New Orleans, which is one hundred miles up the river, and at Pensacola, Fla., be abandoned. Guantanamo should become our great naval base in the Atlantic. If we ever go to war with a European country a decisive battle at sea will be fought somewhere in the West Indies. The water is forty-four feet deep in Guantanamo Bay. Thirty-five battleships can anchor in the harbor and sixteen more can anchor in the outer harbor.

FOR AN IMPREGNABLE BASE.

"I am striving to develop Guantanamo into an impregnable base for our navy, that coal and other supplies may be obtained at all times and vessels injured in battle may go there and be quickly repaired. It is 680 miles from the eastern entrance of the Panama Canal, 1,322 miles from New York and 506 miles from Key West, which is to be the station for our torpedo boats. So long as we have a fighting fleet in the Atlantic Ocean such cities as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Charleston and Savannah are in no danger of attack by sea. A fleet from Europe would first give battle to our own fleet. It would have come three thousand miles for that purpose and would not hazard any of its ships against submarine mines and shore batteries."

"Pearl Harbor, in the Hawaiian Islands," I said, "will become the naval base in the Pacific Ocean?"

"I hope it will be the greatest and strongest of all our stations," Secretary Meyer answered. "It is the key to the Western ocean, being 2,307 miles distant from the navy yard in Puget Sound, 2,091 miles from San Francisco, 4,055 miles from the Panama Canal and about an equal distance from the Philippines. The harbor is deep, will accommodate a large number of vessels and is easily defended."

"Will you give me some figures illustrating the size of the 14-inch guns which are to be used in the arming of the new Dreadnoughts?"

"They will weigh 63 1-3 tons each and will cost \$85,000. The Texas, which is to be built, will be armed with guns of that

culty in going from Boston to the Bermuda Islands. During a war they will follow the fleet, as will torpedo boats, and in battle will attempt to blow up the ships of the enemy by attacking them with powerful explosives beneath the surface of the water."

AERIAL WARFARE OF FUTURE.

"What use will be made of aeroplanes during the wars of the future?"

"They will be sent with the fleet to act as scouts in locating the enemy. It would be practicable, also, to send them out from cruisers on the same duty. That they will ever be used as fighting machines is very doubtful. It has been suggested that they could drop explosives on war vessels and forts. There are some barbarities, however, that are even prohibited in war. Besides, Germany has a gun that pumps lead into the air as thick as rain, and an aeroplane approaching a ship or a fort could be shot to pieces before it got near enough to work any damage."

"As I understand the changes you have made," I said, "the military branch of the navy is now in control of the naval establishment, being subordinate, of course, to the Secretary?"

"I should hesitate to say that the military branch, as you term it, is in control to the extent implied in your question. All of the old bureaus but one are still in existence, and their duties are defined by law. But I have called five aids to my assistance. They keep me informed concerning everything that is going on. Their vision is not on any one spot. My object and their object is to increase the efficiency of the fighting fleet and to introduce sensible business methods into the department. It would be the very nature of things for a bureau to become concentrated in itself. Russia is a government of bureaus, as you know. The navy of France was once a bureaucracy, but now, going to the other extreme, a naval officer is in supreme command. Officers of the line in our navy will say that the Secretary should come from the outside, because he will then have no pet theories of his own to test in time of peace or war."

SEEKS ADVICE OF OFFICERS.

"I believe that the men who go to sea and on whom the country must rely when any fighting is to be done should have the ships which experience has taught them will do the best work. A carpenter ordinarily selects his own tools. A naval officer to-day is in a great floating machine shop, powerhouse and fort. There are scores of engines on every ship. I think he should be competent to make temporary repairs while at sea. Consequently, he should be, and he usually is, an expert engineer, navigator and fighting man combined. With all his technical knowledge, therefore, it follows that he is competent to suggest how battleships should be built and armed."

"So aids from the line are assisting me in the work of preparing our fleet for any contingency that may arise. Likewise they are helping me to economize. Bureaus are now intelligently observed, especially when they pass judgment on their own work. When a vessel is said to need extensive repairs one of my aids ascertains its military value. If it is worth repairing the outlay is authorized. Fourteen of our gunboats cost \$3,447,000 when new. Since launching \$5,000,000 has been added to the first cost in one way or another. Immense sums have been spent on some of the larger ships—\$2,000,000 on the Indiana, a battleship; \$2,100,000 on the New York, an armored cruiser, and \$1,900,000 on the Chicago, a protected cruiser, although its original cost was only \$1,183,000."

"In a word," Secretary Meyer closed, "we are working toward an adequate fleet and are employing modern men and businesslike methods."

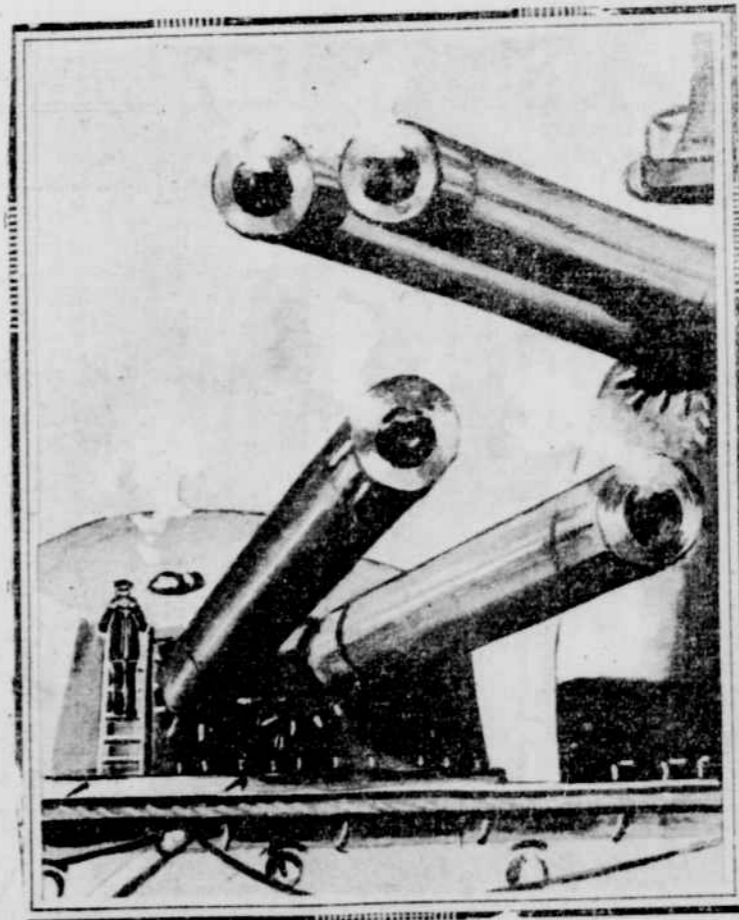
A SELFISH VIEWPOINT.

Champ Clark, the Democratic leader, was discussing, at a Washington dinner, a measure of which he disapproved.

"This measure," he said, "is a sign of narrowness and selfishness. It reminds me of the scholar to whom his teacher said, on February 1:

"Why was George Washington a great man?"

"Because," said the scholar promptly, "we don't have no school on his birthday."



THIRTEEN-INCH GUNS FIRING FROM SUPERIMPOSED TURRETS. They can be aimed ahead or on either broadside and the steel clad walls of the cast off the enemy's shells.

Japan is building three battleships, four cruisers and a number of torpedo boat destroyers and submarines."

"The naval station at Guantanamo, Cuba," I said, "is being developed for the defence of the Gulf coast, the Atlantic coast and the Panama Canal?"

"I have visited all of our naval stations, except Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. We have too many navy yards in my judgment—even in all—while Great Britain,

size. So will the New York, whose construction has also been authorized. The armor-piercing projectiles will weigh 1,400 pounds and cost \$500 apiece. The cost of the powder will be \$230."

"What is there new with respect to submarines?"

"They are being improved constantly, but they cannot steam as far as big ships, they can be navigated in rough weather, and one of them had no difficulty