

# ROOSEVELT AS I SEE HIM

A series by ten authorities...

Herewith, an estimate of  
F. D. R. in the  
first world war



In Washington in wartime:  
F. D. R. and Mr. Daniels.

BY ALLAN NEVINS

Professor of American History,  
Columbia University

**A** TALL, lithe young man, as handsome as William Faversham, is making a speech one cold February evening in a crowded Brooklyn hall. His long face wears a thoughtful look. His firm thin-lipped mouth and strong chin give him an aspect of determination. But his high-pitched voice has a cheery ring, and when he pauses his countenance lights up with a bright smile. Prepossessing in his good spirits, energy, and evident culture, Franklin D. Roosevelt is telling the crowd about the work of the Navy Department in the recent war.

"Two months after war was declared," he remarks, "I saw that the navy was still unprepared, and I spent \$40,000,000 for guns before Congress gave me or anybody permission to spend any money." The audience stirs appreciatively. "In fact," he goes on, "I committed enough illegal acts to put myself in jail for nine hundred years!" If he had made too many "wrong guesses," he adds, he might





**At an Army-Navy game: General March, Secretary of War Baker, General Pershing, Secretary of the Navy Daniels, Assistant Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt.**

have been impeached. He mentions the contribution of Annapolis to the war, saying that the 3,000 officers it had given the navy deserved the greatest credit for training the forces hastily mobilized at sea. And he speaks with pride of one Annapolis man, William S. Sims—recalling that he suggested Sims as the best man for commander of the naval forces operating in European waters.

On another occasion the same energetic young man is telling reporters of the broad scope of the American naval effort. Not merely was an immense fleet kept active. Not merely was some \$30,000,000 spent in laying a mine barrage in the North Sea. "Few realize," says Assistant Secretary Roosevelt, "that the American Navy had fifty-four shore bases of various kinds in European waters and the Azores, including destroyer stations and mine-laying bases. We had more than 70,000 men at these bases and on the ships operating from them. We leased docks and buildings, and constructed hundreds of hangars, piers, hospitals, storehouses, and other buildings." He describes the huge Lafayette radio station with its eight towers near Bordeaux, ensuring communications even if submarines cut the cables.

And a little later, on a speechmaking tour, Roosevelt—now candidate for Vice-President—is speaking somewhat unguardedly of his minor duties. "You know I have had something to do with the running of a couple of little republics," he remarks. "The facts are that I wrote Haiti's Constitution myself and, if I do say it, I think it is a pretty good Constitution!"

These utterances give us certain clues to the character as well as the policies and performance of Franklin D. Roosevelt when Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In his seven years as second in command of the Navy Department, 1913-20—dividing the duties with Josephus Daniels, for there was then no other Assistant Secretary—he showed many of the traits that later stamped his work as President. Versatility of interests; capacity for taking a large view of affairs and applying imagination to them; restless energy; boldness that sometimes became rashness; a tendency to relegate money costs to a minor position; tact in get-





At Hyde Park in 1920, when F. D. R. was notified of his nomination for Vice-President:

Homer S. Cummings, the McAdoos,

Mr. Daniels, and the Roosevelts.

ting along with nearly all types of men; readiness to make rapid decisions, aware that some of them will prove errors; buoyancy and optimism under heavy burdens—these were all part of Roosevelt's equipment in his first years in Washington.

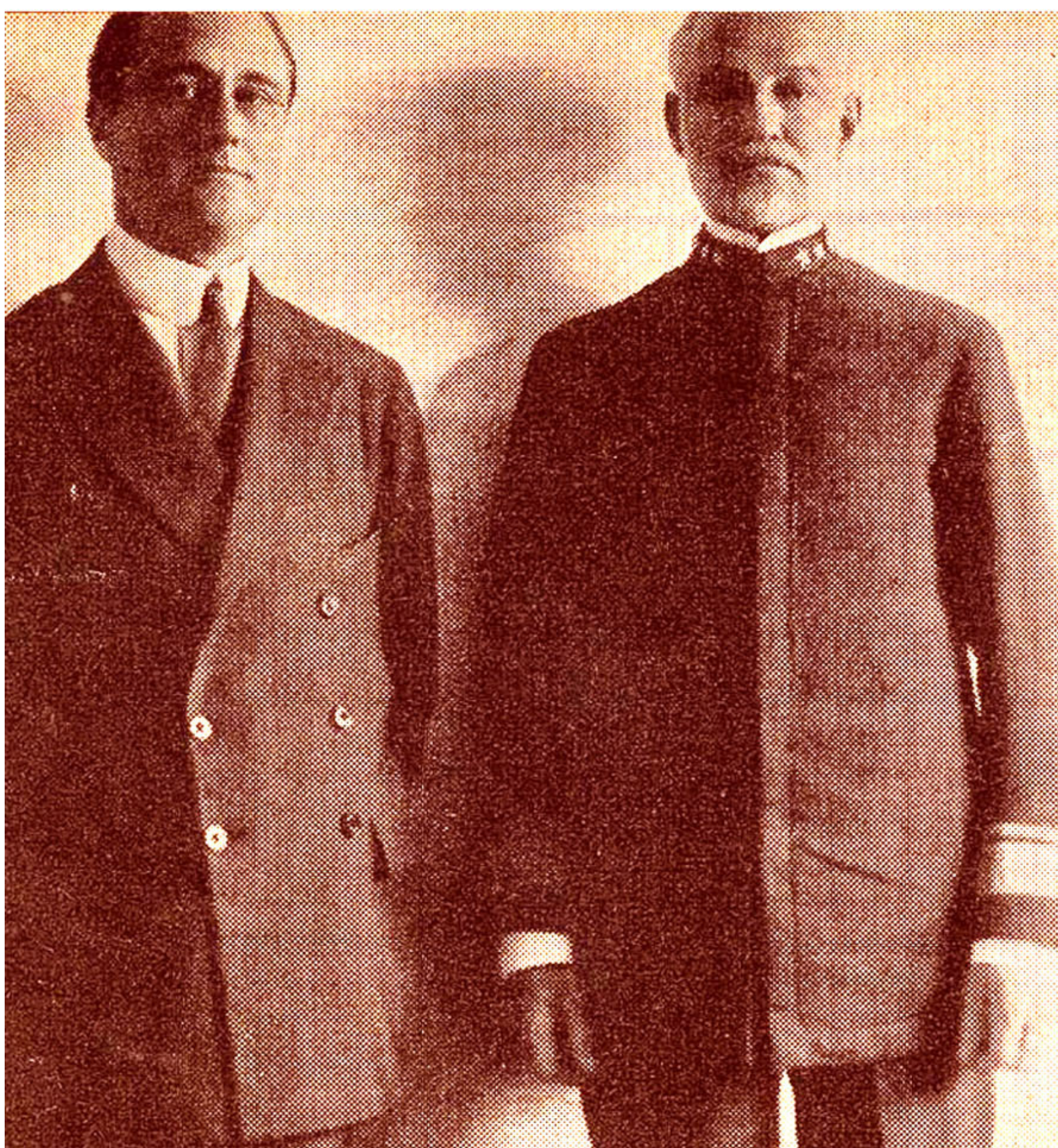
His office helped train him to bold experiment. When he entered it, navies the world over were in the throes of revolutionary change. The dreadnought type of capital ship, introduced by Britain in 1906, had rendered all older battleships obsolete. The submarine was just becoming an important factor in naval operations, its capabilities and limitations still imperfectly understood. Finally, the sea-plane was manifestly destined to play a major role in warfare. All the Powers were interested in designing and building aircraft. Never had navies been less static—never had bold pioneering enterprise been more in demand. Roosevelt had a talent for experiment, and the conditions of the time encouraged it.

**I**T was a long-cherished ambition that Roosevelt realized when he found himself in one of the high square rooms of the State, War, and Navy Building. He had early developed a passionate interest in the sea, naval warfare, and salt-water heroes.

While librarian for two clubs at Harvard he decided to become a collector of naval materials. He began gathering together old volumes, pamphlets, prints, and naval paintings. By 1928 his was rated the second or third best naval collection in the world, and three years later one of Roosevelt's early biographers called it "possibly superior to that in the Congressional Library." Nor did he let his treasures go unread. He became as expert in modern naval history as his distant relative Theodore Roosevelt had become on the War of 1812. When he became Assistant Secretary, he modestly remarked that he had to unlearn a great deal. Yet his background of salt-water experience, of minute acquaintance with marine problems and strategy, and of enthusiasm for naval traditions was invaluable.

For, above all, it was enthusiasm which gave a special stamp to Roosevelt's seven years in the Navy Department. His chief, Josephus Daniels, had many merits, but they did not include much enthusiasm for blue





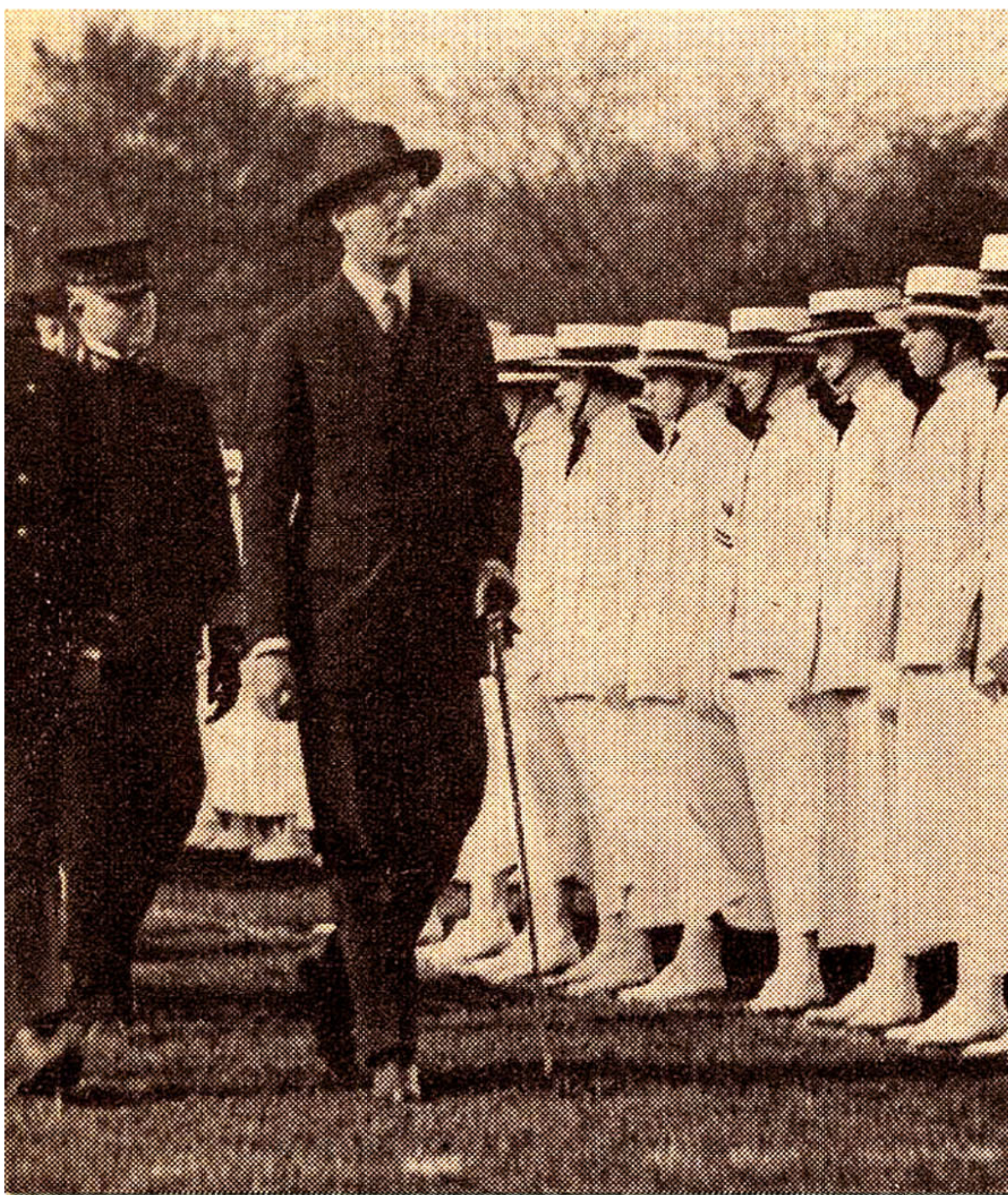
**Assistant Secretary Roosevelt with Admiral William S. Sims, one of the most outspoken and severest critics of Secretary Daniels.**

water, sixteen-inch guns, and naval encounters. He was a landsman, an administrator with reforming tastes, and a lover of peace. The two men had met at the Baltimore Convention in 1912 as co-workers for Woodrow Wilson. Daniels was captivated by the handsome New Yorker who, though hated by Tammany, showed remarkable tact in uniting heterogeneous groups of politicians.

When Daniels was appointed Secretary, he genially admitted that he "didn't know a thing" about naval technicalities. No doubt he scanned the horizon eagerly for an expert assistant; no doubt Wilson thought Roosevelt's campaign services merited some reward. At all events, when Roosevelt's appointment was announced everybody was pleased but Tammany. The only consolation of Boss Murphy was that the young man was temporarily out of New York politics. Roosevelt at once showed his intense zest for the new job. Daniels dubbed him "a steam engine in breeches," and a veteran Washington correspondent was soon writing: "Not a great deal is done over Mr. Daniels' signature without Assistant Secretary Roosevelt's knowledge, not to say consent."

**UNDOUBTEDLY** the navy in 1913 needed both Daniels and Roosevelt. Each brought his special gifts to a difficult situation. Daniels, a strait-laced Southern Methodist, a veteran of long standing in local, state, and national politics, and a seasoned newspaperman, was determined to break with routine. He thought that many naval officers were hidebound, jealous, and defective in judgment. He wanted to put the brass hats in their places. He was anxious to break the grip of scheming contractors and collusive manufacturers on navy funds. He wanted junior officers and plain seamen given a chance to rise. He wished the navy to provide more systematic and thorough education, particularly along technological lines. In most of his personnel reforms and





In Daniels' absence, the Assistant Secretary reviewed a platoon of yeomanettes— forerunners of the present wartime's Waves.

other changes he was entirely right.

Roosevelt, with an equal zeal for improvement, had more respect for naval tradition than his chief, and more tact in handling naval officers. He always deferred to Daniels, whose experience of public life was so much greater than his own. He approved entirely of Daniels' purposes—though he himself would not have taken such steps as abolishing the wine mess for naval officers. Relations between the two men were thoroughly cordial. But a vocal minority of naval officers came to dislike and denounce Daniels. One, the progressive Admiral Sims, attacked the Secretary vigorously in the 1920 investigation by a senatorial subcommittee. Roosevelt steered clear of these rows; he kept out of the Sims battle and all others. Everybody knew that he was a loyal supporter of Daniels. But he also kept the confidence and liking of the most critical officers.

This ability to get on well with all types of men stood Roosevelt in good stead in pushing numerous routine improvements and in his work for general preparedness. His duties were at first pretty clearly defined. He was directly in charge of shore establishments, including the navy yards; of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts (that is, the Quartermaster Corps); and of the Marine Corps. He gave a brisk administration to all these branches. But he also undertook a growing array of larger activities—and here again he profited from his ability to hold the respect both of Daniels and of the professional naval men. During the period of neutrality, 1913-16, he was an untiring propagandist for a larger and better navy; he labored to convert the half-idle navy yards into industrial establishments for making all kinds of supplies, and he built up a valuable Naval Reserve. When war came he had to turn his hand to a hundred tasks, from wage disputes to troop transport and the battle with the submarine.





He knew his guns, and in 1917, on a Marine Corps rifle range at Winthrop, Maryland, he gave the .30-caliber Springfield a tryout.

The navy was in a bad condition when Daniels and Roosevelt took office. This statement may astonish people who think President Theodore Roosevelt had built it up to a high state of efficiency, and who remember that he had sent the battleship fleet around the world. But the fact is that while the navy was strong under T. R., it was not strong enough; and relative to other navies, it became steadily weaker. T. R. was handicapped by having a constant succession of Secretaries of the Navy, six in all, so that no one really mastered the job. He and Taft were both handicapped by the revolutionary changes in naval design and the difficulty of persuading Congress to appropriate enough money to keep up with them.

Not merely had Great Britain revolutionized the capital ship by building her Dreadnought. The United States herself was responsible for an almost equally important change. On the Dreadnought the heavy guns had been carried in turrets placed in echelon on opposite sides of the ship, and the angle sometimes prevented the use of part of the battery in delivering a broadside. But the United States built the South Carolina and Michigan with all eight guns of the main battery constructed on the center line, so that the eight could be fired broadside, either to port or starboard. These alterations made all earlier battleships obsolete. Britain and Germany feverishly built up their armaments on the new models. But the United States lagged behind, constructing an average of but one new capital ship a year.

**H**ENCE it was that one of Roosevelt's first tasks was to drum up sentiment for enlarging the navy and making it more efficient. It seems not unfair to say that Daniels, with all his merits of vision and courage, was first much more interested in an economical, alert, and well manned navy than in a large and powerful navy. He insisted upon





Marching right behind the band at the head of the Washington Senators on the opening day of the wartime baseball season of 1917.

getting better value for expenditures. He made the service more democratic, and furnished such good instruction for sailors that conservative old officers grumbled that he was "converting the navy from a fighting force into a grammar school." He said little about strength. But Roosevelt from the beginning preached bigness and preparedness with an energy which may sometimes have dismayed his chief.

He had not been in office a month before he gave out a public statement urging a more adequate navy. When the European war broke out he became more insistent. He called for more enlisted men. He testified before the House Naval Committee on the relative weakness of the American fleet compared with the chief European navies. He spoke before all kinds of organizations. He took pains to get his speeches to the press, and they contained vigorous words. "Let the American people understand that you cannot build a navy in six months," was his theme. "Teach them in 1913 to prepare for what may happen in 1915."

When at the beginning of 1914 some one declared that the navy had thirty-seven battleships, Roosevelt flatly asserted: "The navy is not fit for war. We have today only sixteen ships we can send effectively against the first line of the enemy." A recent poll of officers, he remarked, had shown them unanimous in holding that one new Wyoming could defeat ten old ships of the Oregon class. That fall another complacent statement drew from him an assertion that the navy was short 18,000 men. If our first fleet were destroyed, he thought any foreign Power could land on the East Coast. "We have a coast line of 2,000 miles, and of that but 200 is protected by coast-defense guns. If I were a Japanese and couldn't land on some part of that unprotected 1,800 miles, I would commit hara-kiri."

**I**n numerous articles he harped upon the same string. Invasion was not





**Friendly political enemies and a patriarch: Tammany's leader Charles F. Murphy (left) and its Sachem John R. Voorhis with F. D. R.**

the main fear, he wrote in the *Scientific American* in 1914. If the United States did not have a powerful battleship fleet, it would be reduced to an international nonentity; it might see its outlying islands occupied, its commerce destroyed, and its influence lost. All efforts must center on a large battle fleet. "That fleet," he wrote, "must at all costs be kept together, for division is fatal; it must be drilled and maneuvered; it must spend good money for target practice; it must contain the best material and latest devices."

Then, when in 1915 Wilson and Daniels swung over to their preparedness campaign, and Congress appropriated funds for a three-year naval-expansion program, Roosevelt's problem changed. More than ever he worked long hours to see that preparedness was made a reality. He and the bureau chiefs labored hard to turn the navy yards from lounging places for political idlers into manufacturing plants. The Norfolk yard was soon making paints and mines; the Charleston yard, uniforms; and the Brooklyn yard, radio sets. When Daniels pushed through legislation making the navy so far as possible its own warship builder, Roosevelt helped boss the task of converting the Mare Island yard into a battleship-building center, the Philadelphia and Boston yards into cruiser builders, and other yards into centers for smaller craft. He reformed the makeshift system for provisioning the fleet. He broke up the collusive bidding of coal contractors by obtaining excellent cheap supplies from previously untested fields.

As war approached he scented its coming. Luckier than Daniels, in 1916 he took practically no part in the Presidential campaign. He appealed to the House Naval Committee that spring for the immediate building of eight new capital ships. He was much occu-

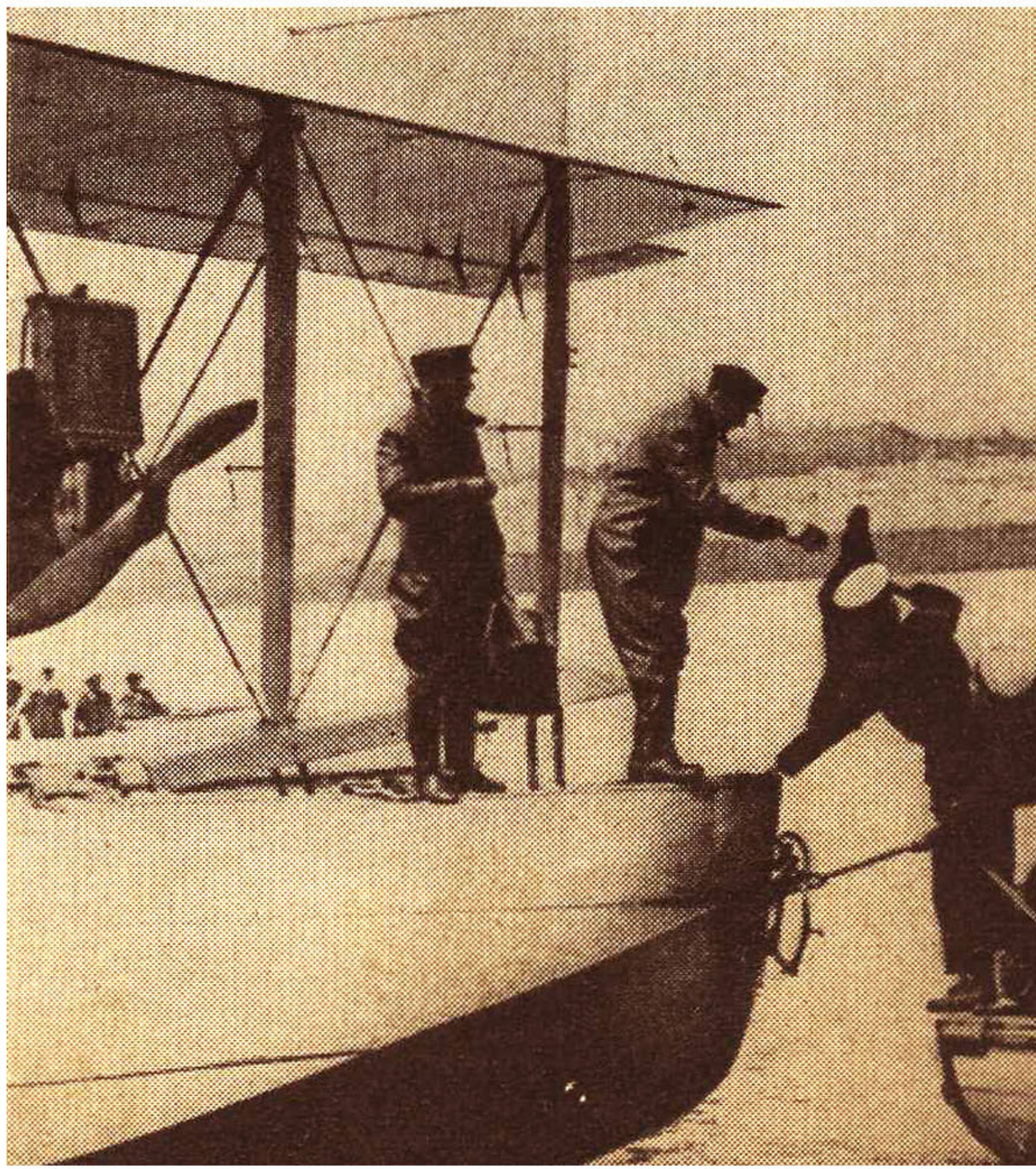


pied with his plans for a strong Naval Reserve. In June, addressing the New York recruits for the twenty-five-day training cruise he had planned, "a Plattsburg of the sea," he said that enlistments were urgent. The British Navy had been rapidly built up to more than 350,000 officers and men. "Today our Naval Reserve consists of 305 men." He wanted 100,000. "It is a sad fact that more than half of the crews of American merchant ships are alien, and so we have got to rely on civilians." He referred scathingly to Mrs. Henry Villard's remark that she hoped her sons would never have to go into training camp to learn the brutality of war. "I have four boys of my own, and I thoroughly hate the thought that in the event of war the lives of my own boys would be further endangered because these boys are untrained."

In the early weeks of 1917 Roosevelt had planned a tour of Haiti and Santo Domingo. But when the German crisis developed he gave this up. More than six weeks before war came, speaking at a conference of railroad and steamship officials in New York, he called for an auxiliary fleet of 750 privately owned ships and 10,000 men to run them. He was not worrying about laws. "We are confronted with an emergency that may break tomorrow. There may be defects in the law creating the Naval Reserve, but this is no time to worry over such details." He wanted the 750 ships immediately inspected, measured, and registered "so that in the event of trouble, all that will be necessary will be to flash by telegraph the word 'Execute.'" The navy by this time had full data on the wartime usefulness of 18,000 industrial plants. Before war was declared it had placed contracts for a full year's supplies. Congress had not yet appropriated money for small guns, ammunition, and depth charges. Without waiting, Roosevelt signed orders for them.

**I**f resourcefulness and daring to the point of rashness had characterized Roosevelt before the war, the conflict brought them into new vigor. The coastal patrol was peculiarly his idea. He got hold of a large group of privately owned yachts and sent them to Europe as a patrol squadron. He was as much responsible as anybody for the 110-foot submarine chasers which did excellent work on both sides of the Atlantic. He took a keen interest in the building of naval aircraft, and with great elation in May, 1918, announced the flight of a seaplane built in a government plant in Philadelphia. Appointed head of the interdepartmental board to settle wage disputes in various parts of the country, he showed his tact to advantage. To help naval construction proceed smoothly, he arbitrated frequent shipyard disputes. The government had no more inveterate hater of red tape. When essential materials were needed, his rule was to





The first NC-4 to fly the Atlantic, at the end of the flight in May, 1919. Roosevelt's approval had helped in making it possible.

get them—and to arrange for authorizations and, if necessary, appropriations afterward.

About the North Sea mine barrage which he energetically helped to promote, a controversy long raged and is not yet settled. Early in the war the British had debated laying a mine belt across the 240-mile stretch from Scotland to Norway. But the distance was long, the water deep, and the supplies of mines inadequate.

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**Liberty**  
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