

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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No. 49/3 THE PLACE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE AND THE SAULT
IN OUR NATIONAL DEFENCE

An address by Mr. Brooke Claxton,
Minister of National Defence, at
a dinner given at Sault Ste. Marie,
by the Sault Ste. Marie Regiment,
on January 11, 1949.

Tonight I thought I should touch on three subjects of great
interest to you and of great interest to all of Canada.

They are:

- (1) The Place of the St. Lawrence Waterways in
our National Defence;
- (2) The Importance of Steel;
- (3) The Role of your Regiment.

(1) The Place of the St. Lawrence Waterways in our National Defence

Here we are 1500 miles from the sea at one of the four
main junctures of Canada and the United States across the mighty St.
Lawrence system. The foresight and co-operation of Canadians and
Americans built the locks which opened the waterways system from Fort
William to Sarnia and joined Lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron into the
greatest inland area of deep water transportation on the face of the
earth. What this single engineering job at the Sault has meant in profit
to the people of Canada and the United States is impossible to calculate.
More tonnage passes through the Sault Ste. Marie canals than through the
Panama and Suez canals combined and this despite the short season.

The way opened here was extended by other canals on through
Lake Erie and Ontario, down the St. Lawrence as far as Prescott, adding
500 miles to deep water inland navigation.

Now there is only the part from Prescott to Montreal blocking
the flow of deep water trade and travel from Lake Superior out into the
oceans of the world.

You will recall that it was during the darkest days of the war
that President Roosevelt and Mr. Mackenzie King worked out again an agreement
for the construction of the St. Lawrence Waterways. The project was
advocated as a great contribution to the peaceful life and trade of this
continent and it was planned as a definite line of communication for the
defence of our continent.

If it were desirable in 1941 that we should construct the
waterways for purposes of transportation and for power, recent events have shown
that it is even more desirable today; if it were desirable to proceed with the
construction of the St. Lawrence Waterways for purposes of defence in 1941,
nothing that has happened since has in any way diminished that need.