

## Municipal France in War Time

By GEORGE B. FORD.\*

In Europe, aviation has raised a whole series of new problems, in the planning of cities, many of which demand immediate solution. When we were in France this fall, we were taken out to one of the great aeroplane camps used in the defense of Paris. There within the high enclosing wall, a field stretched away unbroken by building or trees for several miles, while far down each side ran a continuous row of aeroplane sheds. They told us that there were more aeroplanes then in that one station than there were in all of France at the beginning of the war; more than there were to-day in the United States. And yet, that was only one of a large number of aeroplane or balloon fields throughout France. These fields for training, manoeuvres and storage require acres of continuous open space almost level in character and well-drained. Around most cities such space is difficult to find and it is only by planning well ahead that adequate reservations can be made.

The remarkable increase in the common use of aeroplane and dirigible balloons in Europe to-day makes it obvious that their use for commercial and pleasure purposes after the war is going to be perhaps as rapid in its growth as was that of the automobile.

Still more important in city planning is the problem of providing convenient landing places for aeroplanes. When Ruth Law flew across from Chicago to New York she had to change her plans entirely on account of the difficulty in finding a safe landing place. In New York City about the only place that has been considered desirable for landing is Governors' Island. With the thousands of aeroplanes that will be flying in this country within a few years, whether there is war or not, the problem of providing landing spaces, will become rapidly more urgent. In fact, the Post Office Department is now, in conjunction with the Aero Club of America, planning to select appropriate fields for landing in or near every important centre. In France, most of the aeroplanes, from a standing start, go only some 100 or 150 yards before leaving the ground and then shoot up in the air at a surprisingly sharp angle. They land easily in a 30 acre field. There are any number of places in most American and Canadian cities and towns, which would make ideal landing places if they were leveled off, and trees, bushes, wires and other obstructions removed. The problem of landing at night, is perhaps the most difficult, and dangerous of all. In France, we found the landing places specially lighted by searchlights or by a peculiar formation of the surrounding lamps, so that seen from above, they are readily recognized. Then, too, by day all sorts of special indications were used—whitewash or colored diagrams drawn on the ground, so that an aeroplane from a mile or two in the air could recognize the significance of the marks.

One of the most important problems for the city in time of peace, is the moving of crowds of people quickly from one place to another. Its importance is increased tenfold in time of war. In France, we saw everywhere parts of a great network of national military roads. They often go straight up and down over hills and valleys as did our old turnpikes, but always with the grades cut down to the minimum and with ample width and excellent surface. The roadways are never too narrow for two great motor trucks to pass each other at high speed; far different from our niggardly custom. Though these national roads go through the towns and cities, even in the larger cities, they continue to belong to the national government and are paid for and maintained by it. They are the backbone of efficiency in the handling of people and goods about the country. Without them, France would have had the greatest difficulty in meeting the situation with which she had been confronted.

As for the railroads in France, here again we found men could be mobilized or handled in masses from one town to another with the greatest ease and speed. The special characteristics were ample approaches to the railway stations and extensive yards. Many of the railroad lines have been laid out with the war needs particularly in view, despite the fact that under peace conditions these lines are not profitable. However, they have more than proved their value since the beginning of the war. With regard to tram-

ways, not only are the regular systems laid out strategically, but all over the country, through districts where a standard gauge railway could not be provided, we found little narrow gauge railroads with trains of three to eight cars that were in constant use.

Motor busses have played an exceptional role in France since the beginning of the war. It was the motor busses and taxicabs which saved Paris because they were available and because they were a mobile means of transit. Entirely apart from the usefulness of motor busses in time of peace, it is a great asset to have large numbers of them immediately available in case a sudden need arises for transportation of large bodies of troops.

### Handling of Foodstuffs and War Supplies.

In the transportation and handling of supplies, we found that great changes have been made in France since the beginning of the war. Things had to be handled in much greater quantities and with as little loss of time as possible. In many parts of the country, particularly near the war zone, we saw new railroads being built and old ones considerably extended. In almost all of the freight yards that we saw, extensions were being made, new terminal tracks being put in, huge new warehouses being built, all with a view to handling war supplies quickly and without waste. At Marseilles, we saw a great new classification yard along the new docks that the city is now building, rendered necessary by the trade that has come to the port on account of the war.

We went over the ports of Marseilles, Bordeaux, Rouen and to some extent Havre, but we hardly recognized them, so much had they been changed; building going on on an enormous scale everywhere, the ports being doubled, trebled, and even quadrupled in size and even at that, ships waiting at anchor for days and weeks outside the port for a chance to unload. It was a condition of things that troubled us a great deal, for we realized that hardly a city on the North American Continent was prepared to meet emergency conditions in like fashion. If nothing else, a comprehensive plan should be worked out now, so that it can be carried out as speedily as possible when the time comes.

Rivers and canals were being deepened and broadened on every hand, and new ones were being built, new boat services were being started all because the cheaper handling of freight was becoming an increasingly serious problem in France, since it also means a saving of coal and of men, both of which are at a premium.

However, the thing that probably impressed us most in the handling of goods both along the waterfront, and in the local terminals, was the extensive use of handling machinery. Even in the small villages, the freight yards were equipped with cranes and other handling devices, while in the larger yards and along the docks almost nothing was done by hand. Any mechanical device that would save labor was more than paying in its way, as it released men for services at the front.

The handling of foodstuffs and war supplies in particular, has become a most important problem, with the bringing together and the storage of great quantities of supplies and the provision of efficient means for their distribution. Along the railways or waterways around the cities and larger towns, we saw acres of new sheds that have been erected since the war, just for the handling of war supplies. Often they were inconveniently located due to the lack of planning beforehand. The nearer we came to the front, the greater the number of these storage fields. In every case, it was necessary to find large, level, well drained fields.

### Municipal Retail Markets.

The handling of foodstuffs for the civilian population, is a problem to which France has given careful thought for a good many years. Every city, town and village has its municipal retail markets in big halls open at the sides, where stalls are rented to the little dealers at the minimum economic rental. This gives the city a chance to control not only the healthfulness and quality of foodstuffs, but also the maximum prices, all of which has proven a most effective means of keeping down the high cost of living during the war. More than that, however, there has been a very strong tendency of late years in France, as well as in other European countries, to develop public

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