

New York Tribune
November 15, 1914

Uncle Sam's Diplomats in War Zone Do Him Honor

Famous War Correspondent Tells of Crises Met Sturdily and Wisely by Representatives of This Nation in the Writhing Lands of Europe

When the war broke loose those persons in Europe it concerned the least were the most upset about it. They were our fellow countrymen. Even today, above the roar of shells, the crash of falling walls, forts, forests, cathedrals, above the scream of shrapnel, the sobs of widows and orphans, the cries of the wounded and dying all over Europe, you can still hear the shrieks of the Americans calling for their lost suitcases.

For some of the American women caught by the war on the wrong side of the Atlantic the situation was serious and distressing. There were thousands of them travelling alone, chaperoned only by a man from Cook's, or a letter of credit. For years they had been saving to make this trip, and had allowed themselves only sufficient money after the trip was completed to pay the ship's stewards. Suddenly they found themselves facing the difficulties of existence in a foreign land without money, friends or credit. During the first days of mobilization they could not realize on their checks or letters. American banknotes and Bank of England notes were refused. Save gold, nothing was of value, and everyone who possessed a gold piece, especially if he happened to be a banker, was clinging to it with the desperation of a dope fiend clutching his last pill of cocaine. We can imagine what it was like in Europe when we recall the problems at home.

Banks Refused to Give Gold or Letters of Credit.

In New York when I started for the seat of war three banks in which for years I had kept a modest balance refused me a hundred dollars in gold or a check or a letter of credit. They simply put up the shutters and crawled under the bed. So in Europe, where there actually was war, the women tourists, with nothing but a worthless letter of credit between them and sleeping in a park, had every reason to be panic-stricken. But to explain the hysteria of the hundred thousand other Americans is difficult. So difficult that while they live they will still be explaining. The worse that could have happened to them was temporary discomfort, offset by adventures. Of those they experienced they have not yet ceased boasting.

On August 5, one day after England declared war, the American government announced that it would send the *Tennessee* with a cargo of gold. In Rome and in Paris Thomas Nelson Page and Myron T. Herrick were assisting every American who applied to them, and committees of Americans to care for their fellow countrymen had been organized. All that was asked of the stranded Americans was to keep cool and like true sports suffer inconvenience. Around them were the French and English, facing the greatest tragedy of centuries and meeting it calmly and with noble self-sacrifice. The men were marching to meet death, and in the streets, shops and fields the women were taking up the burden the men had dropped. And in the Rue Scribe and in Cockspur Street thousands of Americans were

struggling in panic-stricken groups, bewailing the loss of a hot box and protesting at having to return home second class. Their suffering was something terrible. In London in the Ritz and Carlton restaurants American refugees loaded down with fat pearls and seated at tables loaded with fat food, besought your pity. The imperial suite, which on the fast German liner was always reserved for them, "except when Prince Henry was using it," was no longer available, and they were subjected to the indignity of returning home on a nice day boat and in the captain's cabin. It made their blue blood boil; and the thought that their emigrant ancestors had come over in the steerage did not help a bit.

Experiences of Judge Irwin And His Party.

The experiences of Judge Richard William Irwin, of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, and his party, as related in "The Paris Herald," were heartrending. On leaving Switzerland for France they were forced to carry their own luggage, all the porters apparently having selfishly marched off to die for their country, and the train was not lighted, nor did anyone collect their tickets. "We have them yet!" says Judge Irwin. He makes no complaint, he does not write to the Public Service Commission about it, but he states the fact. No one came to collect his ticket and he has it yet. Something should be done. Merely because France is at war Judge Irwin should not be condemned to go through life clinging to a first class ticket.

In another interview Judge George A. Carpenter, of the United States Court of Chicago, takes a more cheerful view. "I can't see anything for Americans to get hysterical about," he says. "They seem to think their little delays and difficulties are more important than all the troubles of Europe. For my part, I should think these people would be glad to settle down in Paris." A wise judge!

For the hysterical Americans it was fortunate that in the embassies and consulates of the United States there were fellow countrymen who would not allow a war to rattle them. When the representatives of other countries fled our people not only stayed on the job but held down the jobs of those who were forced to move away. At no time in many years have our diplomats and consuls appeared to such advantage. They deserve so much credit that the administration will undoubtedly try to borrow it. Mr. Bryan will point with pride and say, "These men who bore themselves so well were my appointments." Some of them were. But back of them, and coaching them, were first and second secretaries, and consuls general and consuls who had been long in the service and who knew the language, the short cuts and what ropes to pull. And they had also the assistance of every lost and strayed, past and present American diplomat who, when the war broke, was caught off his base. These were commandeered and put to work, and volunteers of the American colonies were made honorary attaches, and without pay toiled like \$15-a-week bookkeepers.

In our embassy in Paris one of these latter had just finished struggling with two American women. One would not go home by way of England because she would not leave her Pomeranian in quarantine and the other because she could not carry with her twenty-two trunks. They demanded to be sent back from Havre on a battleship. The volunteer diplomat bowed. "Then I must refer you to our naval attaché, on the first floor," he said. "Any tickets for battleships must come through him."

I suggested he was having a hard time.

"If we remained in Paris," he said, "we all had to help. It was a choice between volunteering to aid Mr. Herrick at the embassy, or Mrs. Herrick at the American Ambulance Hospital and tending wounded Turcos. But between soothing terrified Americans and washing niggers, I'm sorry now I didn't choose the hospital."

Two Embassies Running Overtime In Paris

In Paris there were two embassies running overtime; that means from early morning until after midnight, and each with a staff enlarged to six times the usual number. At the residence of Mr. Herrick, in the Rue Francois Ier, there was an impromptu staff composed chiefly of young American bankers, lawyers and business men. They were men who inherited or who earned incomes of from twenty thousand to fifty thousand a year, and all day and every day without pay, and certainly without thanks, they assisted their bewildered, penniless and homesick fellow countrymen. Below them in the cellar was stored part of the \$2,500,000 voted by Congress to assist the stranded Americans. It was guarded by quick-firing guns loaned by the French War Office and by six petty officers from the *Tennessee*. With one of them I had been a shipmate when the *Utah* sailed from Vera Cruz. I congratulated him on being in Paris.

“They say Paris is some city,” he assented, “but all I’ve seen of it is this courtyard. Don’t tell anybody, but, on the level, I’d rather be back in Vera Cruz!”

The work of distributing the money was carried on in the chancelleries of the embassy in the Rue de Chaillot. It was entirely in the hands of American army and navy officers, twenty of whom came over on the warship with Assistant Secretary of War Breckinridge. Major Spencer Cosby, the military attaché of the embassy, was treasurer of the fund, and every application for aid that had not already been investigated by the civilian committee appointed by the ambassador was decided upon by the officers. Mr. Herrick found them invaluable. He was earnest in their praise. They all wanted to see the fighting; but in other ways they served their country. As a kind of “King’s messenger” they were sent to our other embassies, to the French government at Bordeaux and in command of expeditions to round up and convoy back to Paris stranded Americans in Germany and Switzerland. Their training, their habit of command and of thinking for others, their military titles, helped them to success. By the French they were given a free road, and they were not only of great assistance to others, but what they saw of the war and of the French army will be of lasting benefit to themselves. Among them were officers of every branch of the army and navy, and of the marine and aviation corps. Their reports to the War Department, if ever they are made public, will be mighty interesting reading.

Line in Front of Embassy Never Seemed To End

The regular staff of the embassy was occupied not only with Americans, but with English, Germans and Austrians. These latter stood in a long line outside the embassy herded by gendarmes. That line never seemed to grow less. Myron T. Herrick, our ambassador, was at the embassy from early in the morning until midnight. He was always smiling, helpful, tactful, optimistic. Before the war came he was already popular; and the manner in which he met the dark days when the Germans were within fifteen miles of Paris made him thousands of friends. He never asked any of his staff to work harder than he worked himself, and he never knocked off and called it a day’s job before they did. Nothing seemed to worry or daunt him; neither the departure of the other diplomats when the government moved to Bordeaux and he was left alone, nor the advancing Germans and threatened siege of Paris, nor even falling bombs.

Herrick was as democratic as he was efficient. For his exclusive use there was a magnificent audience chamber full of tapestry, ormolu brass, Sevres china and sunshine. But of its grandeur the ambassador would grow weary, and every quarter hour he would come out into the hall crowded with waiting English and Americans. There, assisted by Mr. Charles, who is as invaluable to our ambassadors to France as are Frank and Edward Hodson to our

ambassadors to London, he would hold an impromptu reception. It was interesting to watch the ex-Governor of Ohio clear that hall and send everybody away smiling. Having talked to his ambassador instead of to a secretary, each went off content. In the hall one morning I found a noble lord of high degree chuckling with pleasure.

“This is the difference between your ambassadors and ours,” he said. “An English ambassador won’t let you in to see him; your American ambassador comes out to see you.”

However true that may be, it was extremely fortunate that when war came we should have had a man at the storm centre so admirably efficient.

Our embassy was not embarrassed, nor was it greatly helped by the presence in Paris of two other American ambassadors: Mr. Sharp, the ambassador-elect, and Mr. Bacon, an ambassador that was. That at such a crisis these gentlemen should have chosen to come to Paris and remain there showed that for an ambassador tact is not absolutely necessary.

Mr. Herrick Fortunate in His Secretaries.

Mr. Herrick was exceedingly fortunate in his secretaries, Robert Woods Bliss and Arthur H. Frazier. Their training in the diplomatic service made them most valuable. With him, also, as a volunteer counsellor, was H. Perceval Dodge, who, after serving in diplomatic posts in six countries, was thrown out of the service to make room for a lawyer from Daville, Ky. Dodge was sent over to assist in distributing the money voted by Congress, and Herrick, knowing his record, signed him on to help him in the difficult task of running the affairs of the embassies of four countries, three of which were at war. Dodge, Bliss and Frazier were able to care for these embassies because, though young in years, in the diplomatic service they have had training and experience. In this crisis they proved the need of it. For the duties they were, and still are, called upon to perform it is not enough that a man should have edited a democratic newspaper or stumped the state of Bryan. A knowledge of languages, of foreign countries and of foreigners, their likes and their prejudices, good manners, tact and training, may not in the eyes of the administration seem necessary, but in helping the 90,000,000 people in whose interest the diplomat is sent abroad these qualifications are not insignificant.

One might say that Brand Whitlock, who is so splendidly holding the fort at Brussels, in the very centre of the conflict, is not a trained diplomat. But he started with an excellent knowledge of the French language, and during the eight years in which he was mayor of Toledo he must have learned something of diplomacy, responsibility and of the way to handle men; even German military governors. He is in fact the right man in the right place. In Belgium all men, Belgians, Americans, Germans, speak well of him. In one night he shipped out of Brussels in safety and comfort 5,000 Germans; and when the German army advanced upon that city it was largely due to him and to the Spanish Minister, the Marques Villalabor, that Brussels did not meet the fate of Antwerp. He has a direct way of going at things. One day while the Belgian government still was in Brussels and Whitlock in charge of the German legation, the chief justice called upon him. It was suspected, he said, that on the roof of the German legation, concealed in the chimney, was a wireless outfit. He came to suggest that the American minister, representing the German interests, and the chief justice should appoint a joint commission to investigate the truth of the rumor, to take the testimony of witnesses, and make a report.

“Wouldn’t it be quicker,” said Whitlock, “if you and I went up on the roof and looked down the chimney?”

Ambassador and Chief Justice Play Detectives.

The Chief Justice was surprised but delighted. Together they clambered over the roof of the German legation. They found that the wireless outfit was a rusty weathervane that creaked.

When the government moved to Antwerp Whitlock asked permission to remain at the capital. He believed that in Brussels he could be of greater service to both Americans and Belgians. And while diplomatic corps moved from Antwerp to Ostend, and from Ostend to Havre, he and Villalabor stuck to their posts. What followed showed Whitlock was right. Today from Brussels he is directing the efforts of the rest of the world to save the people of that city and of Belgium from death by starvation. In this he has the help of his wife, who was Miss Ella Brainerd, of Springfield, Ill; M. Gaston de Leval, a Belgian gentleman, and Miss Caroline S. Lerner, who was formerly a secretary in the State Department, and who, when the war started, was on a vacation in Belgium. She applied to Whitlock to aid her to return home; instead, much to her delight, he made her one of the legation staff. His right hand man is Hugh C. Gibson, his first secretary, a diplomat of experience. It is a pity that to the legation in Brussels no military attaché was accredited. He need not have gone out to see the war, the war would have come to him. As it was, Gibson saw more of actual warfare than did any or all of our twenty-eight military men in Paris. It was his duty to pass frequently through the firing lines on his way to Antwerp and London. He was constantly under fire. Three times his automobile was hit by bullets. These trips were so hazardous that Whitlock urged that he should take them. It is said he and his secretary used to toss for it. Gibson told me he was disturbed by the signs the Germans placed between Brussels and Antwerp, stating that "automobiles looking as though they were on reconnaissance" would be fired upon. He asked how an automobile looked when it was on reconnaissance.

Gibson is one of the few men who, despite years in the diplomatic service, refuses to take himself seriously. He is always smiling, cheerful, always amusing, but when the dignity or his official position is threatened he can be serious enough. When he was charge d'affaires in Havana a young Cuban journalist assaulted him. That journalist is still in jail. In Brussels a German officer tried to blue pencil a cable Gibson was sending to the State Department. Those who witnessed the dent say it was like a buzz saw cutting soft pine.

When the present administration turned out the diplomats it spared the consuls general and consuls. It was fortunate for the State Department that it showed this self-control, and fortunate for thousands of Americans who, when the war cloud burst, were scattered all over Europe. Our consuls rose to the crisis and rounded them up, supplied them with funds, special trains and letters of identification, and when they were arrested rescued them from jail. Under fire from shells and during days of bombardment the American consuls in France and Belgium remained at their posts and protected the people of many nationalities confided to their care. Only one showed the white feather. He first removed himself from his post, and then was removed still further from it by the State Department. All the other American consuls I met or heard of in Belgium, France and England were covering themselves with glory and bringing credit to their country. Nothing disturbed their calm, and at no hour could you catch them idle or reluctant to help a fellow countryman. Their office hours were from 12 to 12, and each consulate had taken out an all night license and thrown away the key. With four other Americans I was forced to rout one consul out of bed at 2 in the morning. He was Colonel Albert W. Swalm, of Iowa, but of late years our representative at Southampton. That port was in the military zone, and before an American could leave it for Havre it was necessary that his passport should be vised in London by the French and Belgian consuls general and in Southampton by Colonel Swalm. We arrived in Southampton at 2 in the morning to learn that the boat left at 4, and that unless, in the interval, we obtained the autograph and seal of Colonel Swalm she would sail without us.

In the darkness we set forth to seek our consul, and we found that difficult as it was to leave the docks by sea it was just as difficult by land. In war time 2 o'clock in the morning is no hour for honest men to prowl around wharves. So we were given to understand by very wide awake sentries with bayonets, policemen and enthusiastic special constables. They received us in a way that made trying to force an entrance to the Rockefeller home at Tarrytown as agreeable as reading "Welcome" on a mat. But at last we reached the consulate and laid siege. One man pressed the electric button, kicked the door and pounded with the knocker, others hurled pebbles at the upper windows, and the fifth stood in the road and sang, "Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light."

A policeman came along and arrested us for throwing stones at the consular sign. We explained that we had hit the sign by accident while aiming at the windows, and that in any case it was the inalienable right of Americans to stone their own consul's sign if they felt like it. He said he always had understood we were a free people, but, "without meaning any disrespect to you, sir, throwing stones at your consul's coat of arms is almost, as you might say, sir, making too free." He then told us Colonel Swalm lived in the suburbs, and in a taxicab started us toward him.

Scantly but decorously clad, Colonel Swalm received us and greeted us as courteously as though we had come to present him with a loving cup. He acted as though our pulling him out of bed at 2 in the morning was intended as a compliment. As for affixing the seal to our passports he refused to accept any fee. We protested that the consuls general of all other nations were demanding fees. "I know," he said, "but I have never thought it right to fine a man for being an American."

Of our ambassadors and representatives to countries in Europe other than France and Belgium I have not written, because during this war I have not visited those countries. But of them, also, all men speak well. At the last election one of them was a candidate for the United States senate. He was not elected. The reason is obvious. It is that the people at home are so well pleased with him and our other ambassadors in Europe that while the war continues, they would keep them where they are.