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Theodore E. Boyd World War I Collection - Memoirs and Correspondence Sent to Family, unnumbered

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The French did their best to educate the American artillerymen. They closed their historic cavalry school at Saumur. Cavalry became obsolete in 1914, at least for the trench-and-barbed-wire warfare that had developed in the west. Saumur was made into a school for American artillery officers, with English-speaking instructors. The first class of 400 began work there the first of October 1917. Our party of six Tennesseans, from Captain Sands's battery at Fort Oglethorpe, were to be in that class. We were never told where we were going, however, until two days before we arrived at Saumur. After we had boarded a troop train at Le Havre we were finally told what our destination was.

People of your generation and younger are accustomed to the idea that our country must be able to fight anybody on at least equal terms. Therefore we keep more than two million men under arms in peacetime. We spend more annually on armaments than any other nation. We keep inventing new and more costly weapons. In my youth that was not at all the national attitude. I suppose it is mainly the development of air power and of nuclear bombs that has changed us. They have made it possible to exterminate a nation without setting foot on its territory.

When World War I began the U. S. had an army of fewer than 50,000. Its weapons were all obsolete except its infantry rifle, the Springfield, and rifles were becoming less and less important. The ground fighting in WWI was done mainly with machine guns and field artillery. We were to fight, when we got around to it, with machine guns made in England, artillery made in France, and aeroplanes made in both those countries. Only in the final weeks of the war in 1918 did any of those items, of American manufacture, get into action.

When I was commissioned as an artillery officer, in August 1917, I had never served on a gun crew that had fired a cannon. I had never even seen one fired, except from a distance. That one occasion had been the visit of a Russian general to Fort Oglethorpe that summer. We were paraded in his honor. The band played the Russian national anthem (you get snatches of it in the 1812 overture and in the Marche Slave). And a 17-gun salute was fired with blanks from our 3-inch guns.

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