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Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archives

Edgar S. Gorrell Collection - What! No Airplanes, E.S. Gorrell, undated

Extracted on Sep-19-2024 12:24:18

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hoped they would bring us definite information concerning the types of material it would be necessary for us to supply for the World War, but we found their idea of what we should try to accomplish from a military standpoint almost at the bottom of the list of things they primarily wanted of our country.

By late May, 1917, after we had been at war for almost sixty days, it became apparent that we could not secure definite and useable information delivered to us in Washington from the Allies. We, therefore, resolved to send a Joint Army and Navy Aircraft Mission to Europe to ascertain the answer to two principal fundamentals:

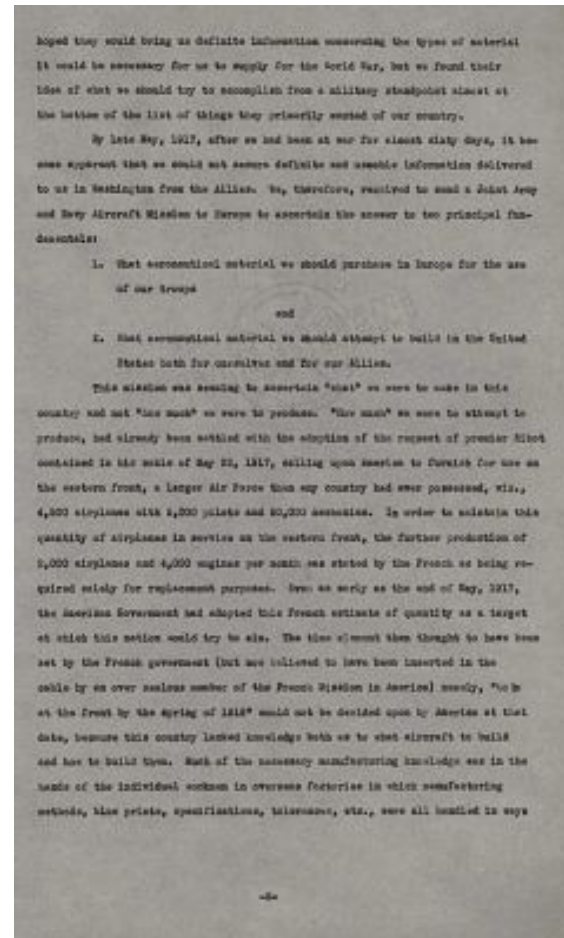
1. What aeronautical material we should purchase in Europe for the use of our troops

and

2. What aeronautical material we should attempt to build in the United States both for ourselves and for our Allies.

This mission was seeking to ascertain "what" we were to make in this country and not "how much" we were to produce. "How much" we were to attempt to produce, had already been settled with the adoption of the request of premier Ribot contained in his cable of May 23, 1917, calling upon America to furnish for use on the western front, a larger Air Force than any country had ever possessed, viz., 4,500 airplanes with 5,000 pilots and 50,000 mechanics. In order to maintain this quantity of airplanes in service on the western front, the further production of 2,000 airplanes and 4,000 engines per month was stated by the French as being required solely for replacement purposes. Even as early as the end of May, 1917, the American government had adopted this French estimate of quantity as a target at which this nation would try to aim. The time element then thought to have been set by the French government (but now believed to have been inserted in the cable by an over zealous member of the French Mission in America) namely, "to be at the front by the spring of 1918" could not be decided upon by America at that date, because this country lacked knowledge both as to what aircraft to build and how to build them. Much of the necessary manufacturing knowledge was in the hands of the individual workmen in overseas factories in which manufacturing methods, blue prints, specifications, tolerances, etc., were all handled in ways

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