

SYSTEM IN OUR WAR

An Interview with Acting Secretary Benedict Crowell, Who Tells of a Year's Changes in Baker's Department

THE War Department of the United States is no longer a military group. It is a business concern.

A year ago we were all emphasizing the fact that the country had undertaken something for which there was no precedent, that everything was different. So it was. But there is as much difference between the methods of the War Department today and those of last Spring as there was between those of last Spring and the activities of 1898. With the ending of the first year of the enterprise, the Government has done what the Congress and the public have insisted all along would have to be done before the country could get its business of army-making and fighting on a sound basis.

All of which is not a declaration that blunders have ceased and that the War Department has reached 100 per cent. efficiency, for that would be boasting and predicting—two things which went out of fashion in Washington about the middle of the Winter, when the Senate began to reveal to the country that much

of the boasting had been hollow and that predictions had not been made good. It is, on the contrary, merely a declaration that the War Department, after a year of struggle and experimentation, has had its great metamorphosis and caught up with the familiar phrase that this is a war of industries and production.

According to supporters of the Administration, the credit for the change belongs to Newton D. Baker, the idealist, because, when he realized as Secretary of War that the whole business could not be put through as a piece of idealism, he called in business experts. He did that from the outset, it is true, but the experts were badly handicapped for a long time by the methods that were not thrown overboard at the start. Now that has been changed, too. Mr. Baker is in France, but before leaving he had things adjusted so that the machinery would run on in his absence. That in itself may be cited as a bit of evidence that things have changed and improved greatly. A year ago practically nothing could be done, no matter

how trivial, without the personal attention and consideration of the Secretary of War. So a good many things did not get done on time, even with Mr. Baker working till midnight seven days a week.

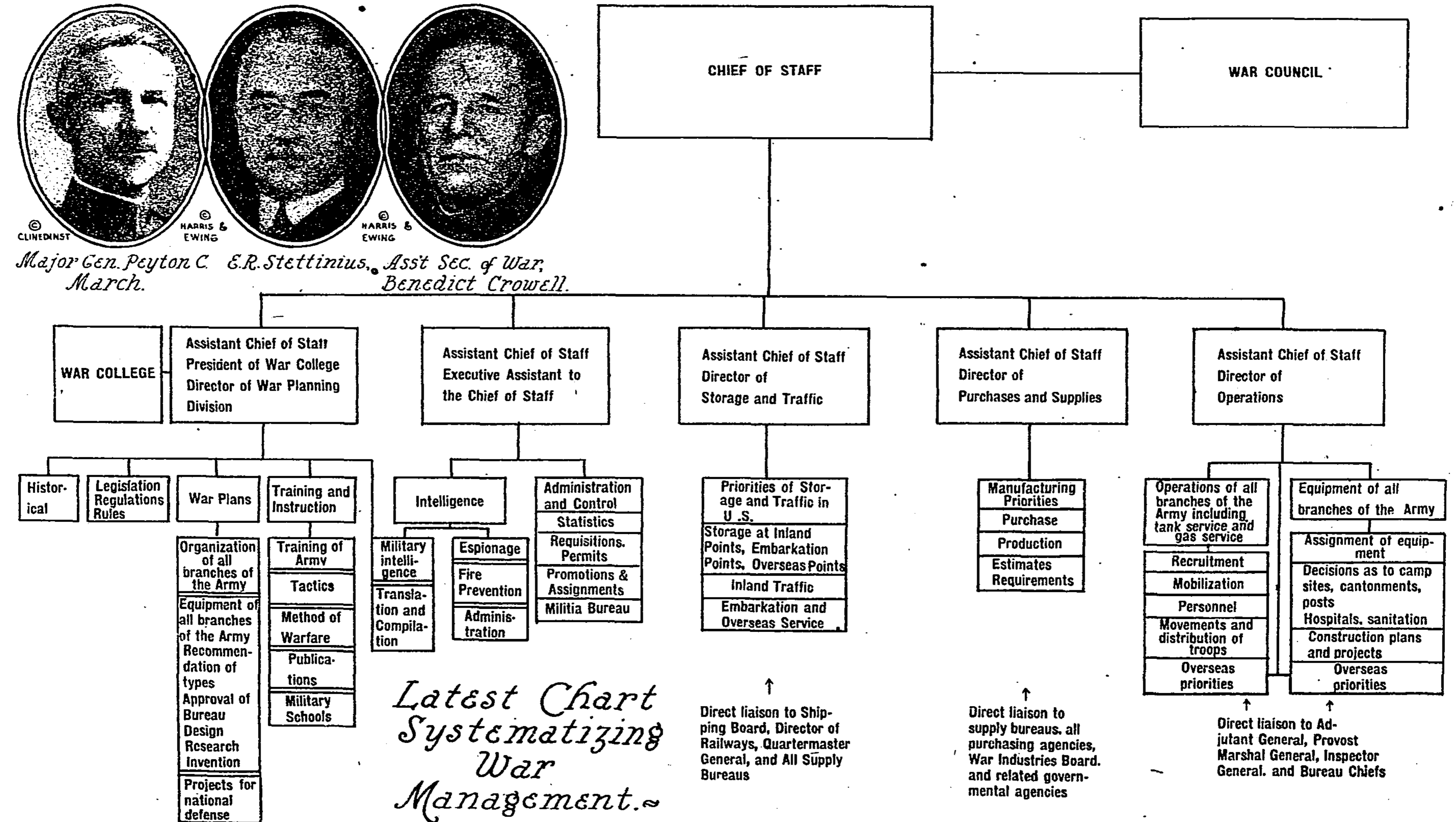
But now it is asserted by those on the inside that the little things and the big things are getting done, even with Mr. Baker abroad and with the Assistant Secretary of War, Benedict Crowell, acting as head of the department. Furthermore, there is more harmony nowadays between the War Department and Congress than heretofore, as is evidenced by the recent arrangement for weekly conferences between the department chiefs and the Military Affairs Committees of the Senate and House.

Mr. Crowell was one of the business and industrial experts called into the department last Fall to help reorganize. It was he who said two or three days ago in an interview that the War Department had become a business affair. He cited the aircraft work of the army as an example.

"A year ago," said Mr. Crowell,

"there were eleven officers, all strictly military men, and about 1,000 privates in the aircraft work. Now in that branch of the war business we have thousands of officers and 100,000 men. But 96 per cent. of those officers are trained business men and engineers from big civil enterprises. Most of them are in military uniform, but that is merely a matter of form that does not go to the substance of the business.

"And this change that has come over the aircraft division in its personnel is illustrative of what is being done or has been done by Mr. Baker throughout the department. There is very little about it today that is military, on this side of the Atlantic, except the outward form, the dress and the assumed military ceremonial. Under all that is the same sort of spirit and energy and organization that is indispensable to the successful business enterprise. The great military work of America, the work of the soldiers, is being done in France. In this country we have settled down to the purely business undertaking of produc-



YEAR'S IMPROVEMENTS IN WAR DEPARTMENT.

Less red tape and simpler procedure.

More systematic organization in each branch.

Adequate power for the division chiefs.

Team work among the various offices.

Creation of the War Council as an effective board, which holds sessions every day.

Co-operation with Congress through weekly conferences with Military Affairs Committees of the Senate and House.

Proposal to have two more Assistant Secretaries, one for social and welfare work in the army, the other for directing purchases and supplies.

ample, the line of liaison from the division of purchases and supplies is to all supply bureaus and purchasing agencies of the army, to the War Industries Board, and all related Government agencies.

"Further co-operation of the War Department, reorganized on a business basis, with those organizations vital to the movement of all equipment to troops here and abroad, is shown by the liaison line from the Director of Storage and Traffic. That line connects the storage and traffic business of the War Department directly with the Shipping Board, the Director General of Railways, and the Quartermaster General.

"Major Gen. Goethals is the Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of storage and traffic, and, as such, has full control over all priority of both storage and traffic at and to inland, embarkation, and overseas points. General Goethals is also still acting as Quartermaster General, a place now not so vital under the reorganization as his office of Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of storage and traffic.

"The other divisions on the chart

pending from the long horizontal line are practically self-explanatory. But I would like to say a word about the War Council placed to the right of the Chief of Staff. It has been called a graveyard, a place in which to get rid of officers who have failed. Nothing could be further from the truth. That is an unfortunate impression that grew out of the fact that the council was created about the time that General Crozier, as Chief of Ordnance, and General Sharpe, as Quartermaster General, were under examination by the Senate Military Committee, and that both of those officers were then relieved of their administrative work and transferred to the council. They were transferred because they were especially qualified to serve as expert advisers on their specialties. There is no man in the country with better or more scientific and expert knowledge on the matter of ordnance than General Crozier. There is no man in the country who understands the principles underlying the big task of feeding hundreds of thousands of men so well as General Sharpe understands them.

"It is interesting to recall that in all

the months of investigation and criticism not a word of fault was uttered by anybody with reference to the quality or quantity of the food supplied to the soldiers in the camps and cantonments. Credit for that belongs to General Sharpe. It was because of the recognition of that fact that he was made a member of the War Council, not because it was desired to find a shelving place for him. Similar reasons prevailed in the case of General Crozier.

"The War Council was created because it was necessary to have a group of experts in the War Department who would have time to study. Up to the time of its organization there had been little time to think about big problems and do nothing else. Everybody was rushed with some form of executive or administrative work. Everybody had too much detail to look after to be able to stand off and get a perspective on the situation as a whole and make a careful, thoughtful study of it. So the need of the War Council became imperative, and Mr. Baker organized it solely because of that need and not to provide a graveyard.

"This council is in session every day and is one of the most effective war agencies that the Government has. There is no man on it who does not bring to its deliberations and conclusions some vital contribution to the welfare of the country and the army. It consists of the Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, General March, Acting Chief of the General Staff; General Crowder, Judge Advocate General and Provost Marshal General of the Army, one of the great lawyers who is devoting his life to the military welfare of his country; Generals Crozier, Sharpe, Weaver, and Pierce, and Charles Day, an able engineer drafted from the Shipping Board to render expert counsel to the War Department as a member of its War Council.

"Of course, I can anticipate your question about red tape—poor, old, and much-abused red tape—without which the army and every other big organization would utterly fail. Complaints of red tape which are always with us come for the most part from men who have just entered the service in subordinate capacities after having been at the head of big industrial and business concerns, where they were more or less independent of the red tape which prevailed in those very concerns, if they were successfully and systematically managed.

"The only man who is entirely free of red tape that I know of is the man in a business of his own so small that he needs no assistance. The instant he hires his first clerk his red tape begins, whether he is conscious of it or not. The rule that requires that clerk to be at work at a certain hour or that requires that he make a record of his sales is red tape. And, of course, it is a necessary thing. It grows with the business, and the business of the American War Department has become a gigantic thing, requiring many rules and regulations to save it from far worse confusion and delay than was ever charged against red tape. We have simplified these rules wherever that could be done without destroying their usefulness, and we have cut out much that was outgrown and reduced the requirements for duplicated and overlapping paper work to a minimum.

"All of which, I think, gives ample assurance that we are in better shape to enter on our second year of war than we were at the beginning of the first year. Every process has been improved. Last September the country was loud with its praises of the manner in which General Crowder managed the first draft. He has worked every minute since then to improve on that method, and his plans for the second draft will carry none of the defects of the first. If it develops defects of its own they will be eliminated in their turn, for the War Department is accepting nothing as final or as the last word of perfection in any of its operations. It cannot stand still at any moment during the progress of the war."