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NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

23 November 1938

M E M O R A N D U M

My dear Mr. President:

Referring to our conversation of last week in regard to possible reasons for the difference in time required by England and the United States to complete a battleship, I had an informative talk on Saturday with Mr. J. W. Powell.

Mr. Powell, as you know, is an experienced shipbuilder who recently sold his Federal Shipbuilding Company to the Bethlehem Corporation. At the present time he has no interest in any shipbuilding industry.

In reply to my request for an expression of his considered opinion as to how England can complete a battleship in less than four years while in the United States it requires nearly five he said:

"1. The Navy Department is badly in need of an official with ship experience in a position analogous to that of a plant "General Manager" and with full authority to decide controversial questions between the Material Bureaus. Much delay is caused by these controversies.

"2. The American Navy in new ships always introduces desirable improvement and changes in design that are in

the nature of development projects and that involve the additional cost and time that must be allowed for the development and production of new and advanced design.

The British to a very much greater extent use in their new ships only proved installations, and in so far as is possible only those that are already in production or ready for quantity production.

"3. In our shipbuilding much time is lost through the practice of referring all changes in design to the Navy Department for approval.

This could be improved by decentralizing the authority for minor changes, and permitting the local inspector to make decisions in regard thereto without reference to the Navy Department."

I have quoted Mr. Powell above as accurately as possible from memory, and his estimate may be of interest to you in your consideration of the question of slow warship construction in America.

Mr. Powell is well informed in regard to British shipbuilding methods.

Most respectfully,

William A. Leahy