

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE:

June 12, 1939

SUBJECT:

Desire of Finnish Government to purchase
military supplies in this country.

PARTICIPANTS:

The Minister of Finland, Mr. Hjalmar J. Procopé;
Colonel Paavo Talvela; the Under Secretary.

COPIES TO:

S, A-B, PA/D, Eu, Co

STO 1-1493

The Minister of Finland called to see me this morning in order that the special military agent of the Finnish Government, Colonel Talvela, might come with him to take his leave in view of his impending departure from the United States.

Colonel Talvela expressed at some length his great appreciation of the many courtesies shown him by the War Department and of the cooperation afforded him by certain of the officers of the War Department whom he had consulted in connection with the desire of his Government to purchase military equipment and supplies in this country. Colonel Talvela also said

that he had met with the most friendly reception on the part of all of the private companies with which he had been in touch since his arrival in this country. The result of his survey proved to him, Colonel Talvela said, that the Government of Finland could obtain in the United States practically all of the munitions and military equipment which it desired. In view of this he said he was now returning to Finland in order to recommend urgently to his Government that it send immediately to the United States a military mission for the purpose of entering into contracts with private manufacturers in the United States for the manufacture and shipment of such supplies.

When Colonel Talvela had concluded the Minister handed me a memorandum which is attached herewith. The Minister asked me to read it in order that I might tell him whether it was an accurate statement of facts and whether it was in a form which would be satisfactory to this Department should it be transmitted officially by him. Upon reading it I told the Minister that insofar as what I myself had said to him in previous interviews was concerned, his statement was accurate. I told him, however, that I desired to emphasize both to him and to Colonel Talvela the fact that under existing legislation the munitions and supplies for which the Finnish Government might desire to contract in this country could not be shipped from the United States in the event

that Finland found herself engaged in war and in the event that the President determined under the terms of the existing legislation that a state of war existed. I told the Minister that it was quite impossible for me to predict what the Congress of the United States would determine insofar as any revision of existing neutrality legislation was concerned although of course the Minister, I was sure, was entirely familiar with the recommendations which had been made by the Secretary of State to the two Houses of the Congress as an official indication of the policy recommended by the executive branch of the Government.

The Minister and Colonel Talvela immediately said that they were fully aware of these facts and that they had taken them into account in formulating recommendations to their Government.

I further stated that my confirmation of the Minister's memorandum could, of course, only include the attitude of the Department of State and my own prior statements to the Minister, and that insofar as the policy of the War Department and the statements of the Assistant Secretary of War were concerned, I was not in a position to give any confirmation. I said, however, that I should be glad to submit this memorandum to the War Department in order to ascertain whether that Depart-

ment coincided in the statements contained in the Minister's memorandum.

Subsequently I transmitted the memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of War who, in a letter to me also attached herewith, confirmed the accuracy of the Minister's statements.

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LEGATION OF FINLAND

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Memorandum

Subsequent to previous verbal conversations the Finnish Minister to Washington, by a Note dated April 17th, had the honour of informing His Excellency, the Secretary of State, that the Government of Finland had the intention of sending Mr. Paavo Talvela, Colonel of the Finnish Army, to Washington on a special mission, as assistant to the Finnish Legation, in order to study the possibilities of arranging for deliveries from the United States to Finland of certain materials and commodities.

In reply to this the Secretary of State, in a note dated April 26th, was good enough to inform the Finnish Minister that the Government of the United States would be happy to assist Colonel Talvela in the fulfillment of this mission.

During the preparatory conversations and particularly, when on the 3rd of May the Finnish Minister had the honour of introducing Colonel Talvela to the Under Secretary of State, the Honorable Mr. Sumner Welles, the mission was defined to discuss and investigate the possibilities for Finland to obtain, in case of emergency, from the United States war materials and other commodities, Finland in such a case might need.

Already on May 3rd the Under Secretary of State kindly declared - and later he has confirmed - that the Government of the United States in the case mentioned above will allow and facilitate purchases and shipments of the intended materials and commodities for the account of the Finnish Government, provided the United States laws and

regulations governing the export of arms and other implements of war permit such purchases and shipments, and provided further the immediate requirements of the national defence of the United States do not prevent it. At the same time the Under Secretary of State indicated that the United States authorities would kindly allow and promote such preparatory measures which might prove necessary in order to prepare the fulfillment in due course and in due time of deliveries as indicated above.

Through the courtesy of the State Department Colonel Talvela was put in contact with the proper authorities in the War Department. Having been received in a most cordial way he was afforded opportunity to discuss at the said Department the various angles of the problems connected with his mission and was subsequently given a list of firms producing the required war materials. Kindly recommended by the War Department he then contacted a number of leading manufacturers in the arms industry and was thus able to get a general view of the opportunities this market affords. Colonel Talvela's investigations have proved that Finland has considerable possibilities to obtain here the materials she needs and also to make due preparations for deliveries in case of emergency.

Colonel Talvela has, however, found out that in certain cases the acquisition of the standard types used by the Finnish army causes various difficulties, especially owing to the long time of delivery. This drawback could, however, be eliminated, if the Government of the United States would permit Finland to buy from companies here materials of the types used by the United States own army. Having discussed preliminarily this question with Colonel Burns of the War Department Colonel Talvela on the 9th of June submitted to the Assistant Secretary of War, the Honorable Colonel Louis Johnson, a request to the above mentioned effect. In his reply Colonel Johnson confidentially stated that Finland will in this respect be granted the same privileges as England and France, and that Finland thus may buy from this country and use all types used by the United States own army with the exception only of the types considered secret.

With deep gratitude for these new signs of farreaching good will towards Finland as well as for the courtesy and highly appreciated and efficient cooperation the State Department, the War Department and different authorities have shown in this matter, the Minister of Finland and

Colonel Talvela have recorded the aforesaid declarations and shall not fail to communicate them to their Government.

Washington, June 12th, 1939.

HJALMAR J. PROCOPE

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THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR
WASHINGTON

June 12, 1939

Dear Sumner:

In reply to your confidential letter of today enclosing memorandum of the Minister of Finland, the statement of Colonel Talvela contained therein correctly reflects my position on the subject and what we said to him.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS JOHNSON

Honorable Sumner Welles,
Under Secretary of State.