

Guns Along the St. Lawrence

By ERIC HUTTON

THIS week in Sorel, Quebec, they put a gleaming deadly new 25-pounder field piece on a pedestal and high dignitaries made speeches about it. It was the first complete artillery unit that Canada has made.

They put the gun on a pedestal and made speeches about it because it is a symbol, a symbol of many things. Of Canada getting into high gear to give Mr. Churchill the tools to finish the job; of great obstacles overcome; of French Canada keeping faith and pulling her full weight in our war effort; of co-operation between private industry and government in forging the implements of victory.

And in Sorel this week, too, was another symbol, one perhaps even more important in the long-range history of this war and this nation than the beautifully ugly gun and its five brothers which they fired while thousands of French-Canadians cheered and officials from London and Washington and Ottawa looked on in approval.

He was "among those present," this other symbol, a man with a roving piercing eye and a muscular torso, who took in all the pomp and ceremony perhaps a little impatiently, because it interfered, if only for a day, with his profession, which is getting things done. The story of Sorel's great gun factory is, in large measure, the story of this man,

gauged from the fact that these lofty brick-and-steel buildings covering many acres, house the most modern machine tools in the world, manned by 1,500 French-Canadian mechanics, and that this is the only armament factory in all North America which receives scrap metal at one end and turns out the finished product at the other.

But there would probably have been no guns fired at Sorel this week, no production line turning out artillery and naval guns in unmentionable quantities, if the Simard brothers, Joseph and Edouard, had not seen this war coming and determined that they and French Canada were going to do something about it.

The Simards annoyed a lot of eminent men in those uncertain pre-war years, ramping in their reception rooms to get a hearing, to preach the gospel of active preparedness. They practically lived on ocean liners during those hectic middle months of 1939, shuttling back and forth between conferences with defence officials in London and

In the heart of French Canada, a huge modern factory turns out a stream of big guns—revealing an epic of our war preparedness

tells you now, "as self-appointed representatives of French Canada. I knew that if we could get a contract into Quebec from England it would do more for good relations between the two races than all the speeches made since Confederation." That attitude plus a complete inability to understand the meaning of the words "You can't do that," is bearing bitter fruit for Hitler in Sorel, Quebec, today. Shortly after the gun factory got under

way, elder brother Joseph placed on Edouard's shoulders the great responsibility of running the plant.

There was a time when he believed that Canada's most important role in supplying equipment for any future war would be to turn out large numbers of fast motor torpedo boats. He still believes in these boats, but meanwhile out of the boat idea, in fairly logical sequences, has evolved this great artillery centre.

It happened this way: On one of his trips to England, Mr. Simard acquired the rights to build "Vesper" mosquito boats in Canada. They were designed to carry 37 mm. guns, and at that time a U.S. agent was trying to interest Canada in a machine-gun of the same calibre. The agent talked guns to Mr. Simard, and thereby planted a seed in

A "TOOL FOR CHURCHILL" is the new 25-pounder field piece above which had its "premiere" this week at the great new gun factory in Sorel, Que. First complete artillery unit ever built in Canada, this gun was shown to the public with five similar guns. These, along with naval guns, are rolling off the production line in ever-increasing quantities.

Where were the millions to come from? Several firms had expressed willingness to organize a factory provided the British government would put up all the capital and provide the experts. The British government was not interested. Fifty per cent? Still not interested.

"Give me 10 per cent, and I'll go ahead," said Mr. Simard, thereby profoundly shocking several sober business men. The British agreed, but also wanted to know what Ottawa thought

shipment to Japan. That may sound like a lot of machinery, but today, less than two years later, the equipment of Sorel Industries Ltd. represents more than 20 times that sum.

The Simard Spirit

BUT it takes more than machinery, the farm boys of an agricultural community and good intentions to turn out artillery. Highly skilled experts are as essential as high quality steel. Britain couldn't spare

quired two and a half years to get an artillery arsenal into production—and not a brick of the factory buildings was yet in place, not a plan drawn.

Returning once more to Canada, Mr. Simard called in representatives of one of the Dominion's largest structural steel companies. "I want," he told them, "so many buildings of brick and steel and concrete, of such and such dimensions. We shall not take up time in talking about prices. Go to work tomorrow and I will pay you what you ask."

The site of the new factory was an old government shipyard, dotted with large wooden buildings. The Simard method of wrecking and clearing off these buildings was typical of the man. He might, as most others would have done, have called for tenders from wrecking companies. But that would have taken precious time. So he put two tractors on the job. Loops of inch-thick wire rope were passed around each building, the ends hitched to the tractors, which then roared off in opposite directions, bringing down the big wooden structures with great splintering crashes. Disposing of the huge piles of wrecked wood was then an easy matter.

"We just opened the gates to the people of Sorel," Mr. Simard related with a smile, "and told them: There is free wood for all! We had nothing more to do then than to have some policemen on hand to settle the fights."

"With clear ground to work on, the steel company entered into the Simard spirit. The outlines of the new buildings were pegged out on Aug. 16, 1939, and by

man, direct or indirect, in Britain's war effort. It was an unhappy blow to everyone connected with the Sorel plant.

"The factory became like a school with the teacher away," Mr. Simard recalled. "The experts from Creusot couldn't work, they were so worried about their wives and children in occupied France. Before my eyes one man lost 50 pounds in 30 days. Then they packed up and went away. Since that day—silence. We have had no news whatever about any of them."

A Winning System

NEW technical advisers were needed, and needed in a hurry, if all the months of preparation, the progress halfway towards production, were not to be wasted. It was then that the SOS went out, and the Chrysler Corporation answered. Soon Chrysler's technicians, sent up by John D. Mansfield, head of the Chrysler Corporation of Canada, Windsor, Ont., were surveying over the plant, organizing planning, getting the wheels speeded up again. W. Ledyard Mitchell, vice-president of Chrysler (U.S.), in charge of international operations, took a personal interest in the co-ordination of the factory. "Mr. Mitchell," says Mr. Simard solemnly, "is a superman."

George Smith, manager of the truck plant at Windsor, was loaned indefinitely as general factory superintendent, and many other Chrysler men are at the disposal of Sorel, without cost. Even the transportation of the experts who shuttle back and forth between Windsor and Sorel is paid by Chrysler. The factory was reorganized, under a control committee of three, with W. Drysdale of the department of munitions and supply as chairman, Mr. Simard and Jan Crone, representative of British government.

The new supervisors found groundwork for production well laid. In the plant today you see 1,500 French-Canadian many of them young, many of them without any mechanical experience less than two years, tending complicated machines that turn out finely chined parts.

"Whatever his faults," Simard maintains, "the French Canadian has one great virtue—

