

Thord's wish for a position on the front in France was granted when he took command of the Eleventh Northumberland Fusiliers in Armantières. He quickly found his niche and drew up a code of model regulations for battle conditions in the trenches. His regulations were later used in a US training manual.

CHAPTER VII

The First World War, 1914–1918

EUROPE

On 19 August 1914 the British Legation chief in Mexico, Sir Lionel Carden, sent the following letter to Thord. ‘In accordance with your wishes, on the fifteenth I duly telegraphed the Foreign Office a message intended for the War Office in the following wording: “To the service of His Majesty’s Government: volunteer T-Gray, age 36, service in Cape Mounted Rifles through the Boer War and as Captain in Zululand Field Force during the unrest of 1906. He has participated in seven campaigns in other countries.”’

The answer from the War Office came on 17 August: ‘Convey cordial thanks. Will notify when in need.’

‘Typical British answer,’ Thord responded to this letter. ‘I went there anyway and found that they had an appalling lack of officers.’

As already noted, his departure from Veracruz took place on 13 September 1914. On 20 October he was in London at the Morley Hotel, where he received a new message from the War Office that it would take a few days before any decision could be made about his employment.

According to several press reports of interviews with Thord in later years, he had brought several hundred recruits with him to England. However there is no other evidence to substantiate this.

On 27 October 1914, he was asked if he would accept a temporary commission as second-in-command of a new regiment.

The upshot was that Thord was given the rank of major and ordered to report to the Third Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers. The intention was that he would serve as second-in-command of the Fifth Battalion, once it had been organised, in Newcastle-on-Tyne. The position involved taking charge of the training of newly-recruited personnel for the infantry battalion.

This was obviously not what Thord had in mind when he travelled halfway across the globe to take part in the large European war. The task did not do

justice to his experience and ability. Therefore he wrote to the War Office on 21 November 1914 expressing his wish to be used in some other capacity. The War Office answered on 25 November that his request would be considered. It now addressed him as colonel.

At this time Thord was resident at the King's Head Hotel, Darlington. He turned to the military chief in the Darlington area, Brigadier Leach, who asked if Thord wanted the position of commander of the Fifteenth Battalion, which might become vacant owing to the incumbent's ill health. On 1 May 1915 he was given that command, but he really longed to be placed in the field. On 18 June 1915 this wish finally came true when he was given command of the Eleventh Northumberland Fusiliers on the front in France. The battalion formed part of the First Army of the British Expeditionary Corps deployed in Armantières.

The Eleventh consisted of 30 officers and 977 men and formed part of the 68th Infantry Brigade, which in turn was one of the three brigades making up the 23rd Infantry Division commanded by Major General James Melville Babington. Thord's brigade was commanded by Brigadier General Eric Pearce-Serocold.

Transport of the Eleventh began on 21 August 1915. Thord arrived in Boulogne at the head of his battalion four days later. They proceeded to Flanders by rail and then by foot. In endless columns, the battalions sang as they marched:

Be they Russian or Prussian
or Spanish or French,
At scaling a rampart or
Guarding a trench,
Neither bayonet nor bullet
our progress retards
For it's just all the same
to the gallant Die-Hards.

In his book *Ivor Thord Gray, Soldat Under 13 Fanor (Soldier under 13 Banners)*, Stellan Bojerud is scathing about the way the war was led. Bojerud visited Flanders ninety years after Thord's arrival there as commander of the Eleventh. En route to the historic battlefields in his little rented Renault, Bojerud stopped at a private war museum in a tiny village to scrutinise its collection of letters from the front.

Even after a year of war soldiers wrote home enthusiastically that they longed to attack. They felt proud and certain of victory. With time that euphoria would give way to disgust and loathing. But it turned out to be impossible for soldiers to relate the disgusting conditions at the front and the incompetent way in which the war was being led. Those who tried to tell the truth were ostracised from the home front and considered as prospective deserters.

Trench warfare on the Western Front was very different from the warfare Thord had previously experienced. His practical character, however, and vast experience of leading men in dangerous environments, ensured that he quickly found his niche

and was able to draw up a code of model regulations for the battle conditions. His eight-page instructions, entitled ‘Trench Routine Orders’, were issued on 20 September 1915. These regulations came to be used throughout his division and were later incorporated in a brochure entitled, ‘Notes on Strategy, Tactics, Attack, and Defence in Trench Warfare,’ published as a training manual in the US.

The section ‘Trench Orders’ dealt with defensive and offensive strategies in trench warfare. The defensive section covered everything from daily routines to the responsibilities of commanders at various levels; deployment of sentries, patrols and snipers; logistics and supply; and rules of conduct during enemy attacks, including gas attacks. The offensive section explains the principles and procedures to be applied in the preparation and execution of an attack at battalion level.

Details of Thord’s experiences during the seven-month period of service on the Flanders Front are sketchy. In some press statements he commented that his unit had to man the same frontal width that was normal for a division: a tenfold larger force. ‘The bluff had to be maintained by attacks here and there and other tricks of the trade.’

We also know of an incident, later reported in the press with the sensational headline: ‘Thrown alive into a mass grave,’ in which Thord was mistakenly almost buried with victims of a heavy German artillery bombardment. At the last minute he was discovered to be still alive, although severely injured.

On 4 November 1915 he drew an elaborate sketch of his brigade and the enemy’s trench systems – especially detailed regarding his own area.

At this time, when the autumn rains made life in the trenches especially arduous, an incident occurred that prompted Thord’s resignation. It concerned the distribution of braziers, which were designed to make it possible to burn fires in the waterlogged trenches.

The 68th Brigade had been given 258 braziers for use in the trenches. The brigade command ordered them distributed so that the staff would receive 18 and each of the four battalions 60. The battalions reported that they had received the following numbers: the staff none, 10th and 11th battalions 66 and 52 respectively, and 12th and 13th battalions 50 each. On 28 October, however, it was reported that the staff had none, and the respective battalions had 95, 35, 39, and 0. Clearly the final distribution of the braziers did not accord with the original order and some of them had gone missing. However, the original order stipulated that the braziers were intended only for use in the trenches. Therefore there was a contradiction in ordering some to be allocated to the staff and reserve battalions, since neither the staff nor the reserve battalions were in the trenches.

Thord’s sketch makes it clear that A and B Battalions were deployed in the foremost line and the others in the rear. Thus it was to be expected that these two battalions would get the bulk of the braziers, as they were in the trenches, where (according to the order) the braziers were to be used. There is some confusion arising from the fact that the battalions in question are called A, B, C, and D in some places and 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th, in others. A and B are in fact the 10th and 11th Battalions. The chief of the brigade issued the following rebuke:

- a) A serious departure from regulations had occurred due to great negligence by the responsible officers.
- b) Army orders direct that the articles in question should be used in the trenches but the units had disobeyed that order.
- c) The large number of braziers in A Battalion indicated that two regiments of the Northumberland Fusiliers were the culprits.

The chief of the brigade decided that A Battalion should send: Five braziers to B Battalion's staff; one brazier to C Battalion's staff; nine braziers to the brigade's depot for the brigade HQ staff; and forty braziers to D Battalion.

In addition, a careful search should be carried out for the missing braziers and it should be reported when they had been found.

It was furthermore forbidden to move braziers without orders from the commander of the brigade.

Thord made the following annotations on the order from the brigadier concerning the 95 braziers at A Battalion: '10th, 11th obeyed orders; consequently the 95 in the entrenchment.' Regarding point c) above he said: 'On the contrary, it proves that we obeyed the order.'

On 30 October 1915 Thord wrote to the brigade staff:

Hereby I have the honour of handing in my application for resignation from command over the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers. I have executed all your orders literally in spite of the very difficult conditions in the wet entrenchments. Today I was openly accused of being a criminal in your circular order of the 29th regarding braziers after I had carried out your order regarding those.

You have given me no other choice but to resign.

I wish to inform you that I have been a military man for eighteen years and that this is my eleventh campaign. When this war broke out, I was chief of staff in an army in the field, but I left that post to come home to this war. I do not leave my present post because I lack training or discipline.

I Thord-Gray, Lieutenant-Colonel.

It was easy to identify with Thord's feelings when he wrote this letter. It might be more difficult to explain the brigadier's, but he reported on 1 November 1915 to the chief of division in the following words:

'Attached: Copy of my circular letter on 29 October, which Lieutenant-Colonel Gray's complaint is connected with. I am in favour of granting him leave from his post as chief of the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers. He has not executed my orders literally, in spite of his assurance that he did so.

'He prefers to use his own methods, which at times are contrary to mine and they are not compliant with what is generally accepted in the British Army. I do not regard him as a trustworthy chief. EPS.'

The last sentence was at some time scratched out and replaced with: 'I am of the opinion that at times he lets his diligence prevail over tactfulness. EP Serocold, Brig Gen, Commd 68th Inf Bde.'

Of the new final sentence Thord recorded: 'Division and corps did not accept this alteration.'

The chief of 23rd Division, Major-General Sabington, forwarded the document to staff of III Army Corps on 2 November and recommended that Thord's resignation should be approved. He added: 'At the same time as this officer possesses certain qualifications, he does not show understanding of the importance of details, which is important for a chief of battalion.'

The Chief of III Army Corps, Lieutenant-General Pulteney, passed on the communication to the 1st Army staff on 5 November 1915 and wrote: 'My opinion of this officer is that he is extraordinarily suited to command a colonial troop but not for his present post. He would be a very useful officer for the Orient.' Thord was informed on 10 November of the recommendation and was given the original documents with a request for them to be returned. Thord's copies of these documents form the basis of the present description. The chief of brigade's letter on 1 November resulted in his replying on 11 November:

'The alteration which the chief of 68th brigade has made in the last sentence... is greatly appreciated. The choice of words and the content of one sentence are for some unknown reason very different from the other. I hope the above-mentioned will change and convey some adjustment of the opinion the division (and the chief of corps) has established about me.'

The same day, on 11 November, he wrote the following letter addressed to the military secretary, War Office:

'As far as I know, the chief of the 68th brigade has changed his report once again to what was written before I travelled, and my letter of 10 November was removed from the documents. I take the liberty to say that there is not one chief of battalion in our army today that has experienced as much war service or that knows the new drills and infantry tactics more than I have at my fingertips. I am 37 years old and last year commanded an army in a campaign. I have trained two of the new army battalions and been chief of one in France, and yet in this our national crisis, I encounter great difficulties to be heard when I wish to get help and the adjustment of things that are absolutely erroneous. I therefore once again offer my services. I attach a copy of my orders for service in the entrenchments in France. Some of this can be of use in the training of our young troops at home. These exact orders were later used more or less by the whole division.

'I can procure for you five to ten thousand British recruits in the US if you wish without in the least affecting US neutrality.'

He wrote further letters to the Military Secretary, War Office, on 21 and 28 December. By then he was back in London. That of 21 December reads as follows:

Sir, Would you be kind enough to answer the following questions?

- I. Shall I get the opportunity to explain to Lord Kitchener or to you the serious reasons that rendered it necessary to take leave of my command in France?
- II. Will your country fail to secure my experience, gained from eleven campaigns and eighteen years of military service, all because I cannot get the opportunity to explain my apparent breach

of discipline when I took leave of my command, although I had the most serious reason for my action? I took leave with the aim of trying to improve the situation.

III. Can the following be acceptable to me and do I not have a right of redress?

The report that the chief of 68th brigade submitted concerning my resignation was sent to me by 1 Army Staff to read. When I asked the chief of 68th brigade about his last sentence he admitted his mistake, scratched it out and wrote instead: 'I am of the opinion that at times he allows his diligence to prevail over tactfulness!'

Thord received the following reply: 'In answer to your letters of 21 and 28 December I have to inform you that everything you write regarding your recent resignation from command over 11th Bat Northds. Fus. will be taken into consideration with regard to the Field Marshall's and the Chief of Expeditionary Corps' remarks and that full consideration has been given to your case in France.

'It is not intended to remit the communication again for continued reports. Since every one of your statements had to be written to gain consideration, nothing would be gained by granting you an interview with the purpose of a verbal explanation. The intention is not to exploit your services to set up a unit of Britons residing in the US. Regarding your possible usefulness in the future, you are still eligible to be chosen. But with regard to the reports of your methods not being compatible with those that are generally accepted in the British Army, the possibilities of using your services seem slight. Meanwhile this department has no right to your duties and you have every right to take up any other kind of employment you are offered.'

In the margin of this letter Thord noted: 'But I raised the British-American Brigade and before that the 1/26 and 2/26 Bns. London Regiment.'

Another note in the margin on the documents, that Thord surely made with certain satisfaction: 'Brig General in France got pushed out as medically unfit and has no command, silly old him.'



Bojerud suggests in *Soldier under 13 Banners* that Thord's disagreements with his chief, Brigadier General Eric Pearce-Serocold, did not simply stem from Pearce-Serocold's accusation that Thord had appropriated more than his battalion's fair share of braziers to warm the trenches. There was a second significant issue:

In his Trench Routine Orders, Thord had prescribed methods that were unknown hitherto in the British Army. Consequently Pearce-Serocold accused Thord of disloyalty and refusal to follow the King's Regulations.

Bojerud describes the British Army's methods for trench warfare in WWI as 'a low-water mark in the history of modern warfare'. Troops were afforded no chest protection against machine-gun bullets and 'men were fed constantly into the war's meat grinder'.

Thord's attempts to devise more useful methods met with compact resistance from the establishment: he was regarded as somewhat of a rebel.

The Loos offensive had cost Britain about 60 000 men to conquer a piece of land that was barely big enough to serve as burial ground for the dead. Sir John French was withdrawn on 19 December 1915 to be succeeded by Sir Douglas Haig. The latter would in time, however, prove to be as big a consumer of human life as his predecessor.

Eric Pearce-Serocold went to Eton and Sandhurst. He fought in the Boer War from 1899 to 1902 as officer with the King's Royal Rifle Corps and went to the front in France as chief of the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps in August 1914. He was wounded at Herenthage Chateau on 21 October 1914 and never fully recovered from his wounds.

Eton and Sandhurst: It was not only the eight-year age difference that separated Eric and Thord. They came from different worlds. Eric was a typical product of British officer training, backed by many years' service in a well-disciplined army. Thord was a colonial, a self-made man who had worked his way up... to officer's ranking. To expect these two men to reach consensus on military issues would be naïve.

The matter had now reached the War Office and Thord was granted permission to leave the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers on 30 December 1915.

Ironically, after Thord's departure his Trench Routine Orders were brought to the attention of 23rd's commander, Major General JM Babington, who ordered that they be made effective throughout his division.

Thord wrote to the War Office requesting appointment to another regiment. The reply was evasive: Thord had requested release from his command during an ongoing war, which was regarded as a lack of discipline.

It is understandable that after getting into such difficulties Thord was starting to feel misunderstood and downhearted.

Matters other than his resignation contributed to this. At the beginning of November, while he was still with his battalion, he asked a London firm to send £25 to his mother in Stockholm. On the firm's reply to his request for acknowledgement of receipt Thord noted:

'This was what started the trouble about my foreign origin and the fear of spies. Then the Boström's dinner followed in London. They did not want to speak English. I was in British uniform. Boström, later ambassador in Washington, was the most difficult.' It later emerged that one of the servants had thought they were speaking German.

When an opportunity arose for Thord to go with General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrier as Special Service Officer to East Africa, the Secretary of State for War refused the general's request for Thord to accompany him. The official reason given was that anyone on his staff in this post had to have a definite appointment. 'The general is very sorry to have to tell you this, but the Secretary of State is very firm on this point.'

Were his former wife Edith and her family possibly influencing the authorities and creating the opposition he was experiencing? But Thord was not one to give

up easily. His experience of recruiting and organising new units led him to ask for permission to try to do this also in England.

On 18 January 1916 Thord got advance notice from Lieutenant-General E Bethune, Director-General, Territorial Forces, that in a few days he would get War Office permission to set up a regiment of overseas men. It was to constitute a part of the 1st London Division. Regarding questions of staff and other details, he was directed to get in touch with the County of London's Territorial Forces Association, Duke of York's staff, Chelsea.

Official acknowledgement came through Army Council Instruction No 3401916, issued by the War Office on 11 February 1916. An infantry battalion 1/26 (Overseas) Battalion and a depot battalion 2/26 (Overseas) Battalion, London Regiment, were to be organised. Only men born in or usually resident in British possessions or colonies overseas were eligible to be recruited. In the following days the British press was full of appeals for donations for the new unit. London's Lord Mayor set a good example by being one of the first to respond. But even in this task Thord was to encounter opposition.

On 24 February 1916 Lieutenant-General Bethune wrote to Thord that the high commissioner in South Africa had enquired about the new unit. He apparently did not know anything about it. From the Union of South Africa's point of view he wished that these men should be used either in the South African contingents that were now being recruited in England or in some other battalion of the regular army or the territorial army.

In addition, the new adjutant-general felt dubious about Thord's capability to recruit his two thousand men within reasonable time. Under these circumstances Bethune said that he was afraid that it would not serve any purpose to continue the work when Thord had the high commissioner against him. Moreover, in the adjutant-general's opinion it was not advisable to set up any new unit. He was sad that Thord's work had not borne fruit. He had been under the impression that Thord had a great number of men waiting who had done military service earlier, when in fact it turned out that Thord had only 160 men. He wanted to inspect Thord's people on 26 February to speak to them and see what he could do. He was afraid that after the inspection he would have to give orders, with explanations, to dissolve the battalion. He hoped to find use for Thord in some other unit.

'Politics,' wrote Thord in the margin of this letter.

On 29 February Bethune returned to the subject in a letter to Thord. He regretted that Army Council had decided that Thord could not hope to have his regiment ready within a reasonable time. It should therefore be dissolved. He thought that Thord had been unlucky but was of the opinion that individual considerations had given way to what was generally beneficial for the army. Thord's people would be asked if they wanted to become volunteers in some other regiment or if they wanted to leave. Bethune hoped that they would agree to transfer. As for Thord, Bethune said he wanted to do his best to place him with other territorial units. He said that he himself had been a bit doubtful all along but Thord had been so optimistic that he thought he should be given his chance. The delay had been to

Thord's disadvantage but was unavoidable. In a large army things cannot get done in five minutes.

'Really politics. I had the men,' read Thord's margin notes to this letter. Already the following day vehicles were sent to collect all the unused clothes and provisions at the unit.

Undeniably Thord had a plethora of setbacks during this winter of 1915–1916. It was not surprising that he felt thwarted and became increasingly suspicious that there was a conspiracy behind it all. In particular the intervention from South Africa had put a spoke in the wheel of his organisational work and that irritated him. It was unclear on what grounds, but he became more and more convinced that his divorced wife in South Africa and/or her family were behind it all and had worked on the authorities to get them unfavourably disposed toward him.

Naturally he started to think of moving to friendlier climes. In addition, the Flanders entrenchments had not left him unscathed. He suffered from the effects of trench foot and malaria flared up from time to time.

There seem to have been plans to accompany Lord Horatio Kitchener on his ill-fated trip to Russia in June 1916. Birger Hultstrand, in *De Stora Äventyren (The Great Adventures)*, stated that only a delayed train had prevented this.

It also saved Thord from a watery grave in the North Sea, as Kitchener died along with more than 600 others when *HMS Hampshire* struck a German mine west of the Orkney Islands on 5 June 1916.

Eventually he set his sights on Mexico and the US. He obtained a certificate from the Mexican Consulate in London confirming his service in Mexico and Great Britain. The certificate concluded with a citation from a London newspaper stating that Thord at only 37 years had more experience than many generals and in addition was a man of honour.

But other plans were apparently being considered at the same time. Lieutenant-General Bethune wrote a letter to Colonel Llewellyn in the Colonial Office on 21 June, a letter that Thord was supposed to deliver.

'I understand that the previous chief of the Camerons intends to take Colonel Gray to you with the intention of placing him with the King's African Rifles. It was in December last year that Colonel Gray came to me and asked to be utilised militarily. He organised and carried the command over the Overseas Battalion of the London Regiment. He had earlier held command of a battalion in France. For state reasons, this battalion was dissolved in May 1916. It was no fault of Gray's. But he has started to miss military employment. I think that he would be a good leader for troops in field service.'

On 4 July General Bethune once again gave an opinion of Thord, this time to Sir Robert Perks, who had apparently asked around about Thord:

'It struck me that Colonel Gray was a very pleasant man and his service record is very good. He has shown himself to be an excellent and courageous soldier. He came here introduced by a Colonel Royston from South Africa's National Defence – a man that I have known for many years and I do not believe he would fool me. I do not know if it is of any use but I do not like to speak of a man's private

life when I know nothing about it. All I can say is that I was totally prepared as a soldier to give him the command over a territorial battalion and that in itself ought to be a sufficient recommendation.'

Robert Perks sent a copy of this letter to Thord, who at the time (July 1916) had his mail sent to the British Consulate in New York. Perks believed the letter would be of use to Thord both in New York and in the General Council in Washington.

A new start might be necessary. He had not received any kind of thanks for volunteering his experience and services to Great Britain. But on 29 August 1916, the War Office announced that 'The Officer-Paying Imperial Pensions, Ottawa', had been authorised to pay £24 and 12 shillings for Thord's travel expenses from Mexico to Great Britain in the autumn of 1914. It was the cost of the train ticket from Mexico City to Veracruz (£1.10) and the crossing from New York to Liverpool (£23). On the other hand he would get no compensation for the trip from Veracruz to New York. It was against regulations!

THE US AND MEXICO

AS OF the beginning of July 1916, Thord was staying in the US with the intention of returning to Mexico. The Entente powers (Britain, France and Russia) sought to involve the US in the war. Germany was trying to prevent this. One way was to induce Mexico to do something that would distract US interest in that direction.

Thord undertook the task of visiting his 1913–1914 war comrades to countervail this German influence. He was not officially collaborating with any US institution or public servant, but after a while an obvious association became apparent. In the beginning the task proved to be more difficult than expected.

Bojerud's chapter entitled 'At War Against an Invisible Enemy' provides telling evidence that Thord's struggle during WWII was to take place on another front – against invisible enemies. Even Thord would never be privy to the full truth about his participation in the war. This was only disclosed long after his death, when the British War Office declassified his dossier.

The National Archives contains 208 documents about Thord, detailing 'even stranger things than his own activities during that dramatic chapter in his life'.

In fact the years 1916 to 1918 came to be probably the most troublesome time in Thord's life and his correspondence manifests increasing frustration, which in 1917 bordered on pure desperation.

What Thord did not know was that in British eyes he began to be a suspected person. It began with a telegram from the Foreign Office to Mr Hohler – who was then *chargé d'affaires* at the British Embassy in Mexico City – with a request to engage Thord.

Thord himself had a high opinion of Thomas Hohler, whom he had known for some time, but this estimation was not reciprocated. Hohler had nothing personally against Thord, of whom he had a positive experience, but concerning Thord's motives he was outspokenly suspicious: why had this Gray come back to Mexico when the Great War was ongoing in Europe? What was he doing here? Who was he actually working for?

Hohler discouraged the Foreign Office from engaging Thord and even requested that Scotland Yard investigate Thord's background.

Letters and telegrams concerning Thord began to cross the Atlantic. The MI5 agency and Scotland Yard began to investigate who Ivor Thord-Gray could actually be.

Mr Hohler followed up his telegram with two letters. The first one reported on a certain Captain Newham Gray, who was believed to actually be German. He had been in Mexico in 1913 to try and sell Maxim machine guns, but since December 1914 he was believed to be active in New York.

The second letter concerned Thord, who was described as completely unreliable, and Hohler once again questioned his past. Hohler was concerned that Thord had served under so many different banners that he could conceivably be prepared to sell his services to anybody, including Germany. In an undated memorandum it appears, however, that the Foreign Office still regarded Thord as valuable: 'He appears to be a downright mercenary who is willing to go anywhere and fight for anybody who will pay him. Despite his Swedish training he has never been charged with Swedish or German sympathies and his presence in Mexico will probably be more to our advantage than to the contrary.'

On 27 June 1916 Thord left Liverpool onboard the SS Philadelphia. Before his departure he had written to the British Consulate General in New York.

The Consulate General immediately began to suspect Thord upon receipt of his letter, because it knew that the aforementioned Colonel Gray had operated as German agent in New York from 1914 to 1915, but had since gone underground.

The Consulate General even noted that Thord had written on stationery from the Bachelors' Club in London. The German agent in question had apparently done the work of a proper mole and infiltrated the British Army. The Consulate General sounded the alarm in a telegram to security agencies in London.

After his arrival in New York on 9 July [1916] Thord reported to the Consulate General and met with the British intelligence chief, Commander Gaunt. He offered to work for Britain in Mexico, but was only partially successful. It would be welcomed if Thord conveyed his observations [to the British], but he did not receive any specific assignment to do so.

Unaware that he was under suspicion and had been placed under surveillance, Thord took the train to Washington DC and visited the British Embassy, where he met the military attaché, Colonel O'Brien. The latter was friendly toward Thord and echoed Commander Gaunt: Thord's reports would be welcome, but he could not be given an assignment.

The American and British intelligence services continued to watch Thord and discovered that he had entered the US on a Mexican passport and represented himself as a Mexican citizen. Naturally this appeared to be highly suspicious.

Thord continued his journey to Mexico, where he looked up his old friends. He even visited Hohler at the embassy, who was friendly but evasive. Thord began to feel that something was not right, as he had at least expected to be welcomed with open arms. At the Swedish Embassy, however, he received a hearty welcome and developed extensive contacts, which would take on a certain significance in the future.

Without becoming dejected over the Britons' lukewarm attitude, Thord pursued his self-appointed mission as private intelligence agent and reported his findings to Major General George Bell, a friend from the Philippines who was chief of the American troops in El Paso, as well as to Commander Gaunt in New York and the British Embassy in Washington, DC.

Thord gradually tired of receiving no response from the British Embassies in Mexico City and Washington, DC. He therefore decided to return to the US and left on 20 September [1916] onboard the SS Monterey.

Before his departure he had written to Commander Hopkins, whom he knew from the Philippines, about his difficulties. When he arrived in New York, on 2 October 1916, a reply from Hopkins was already waiting for him at his hotel. Hopkins told him that a certain Colonel Gray, who was suspected of being a German agent, had been active in New York from 1914 to 1915, thus during the time that Thord had been in Europe.

This Colonel Gray had already turned up in the US in 1914, and it was known of him that he claimed to have seen service in India and had even been active in Mexico. Commander Hopkins even gave a description of this other Colonel Gray: he was corpulent, wore glasses, and spoke with a pronounced German accent. He had even reported this suspicious Gray to the British intelligence chief in New York, and now he had even enlightened Commander Gaunt that Thord had been mistaken for this German agent Colonel Gray.

It was now clear to Thord that he had been under suspicion by the authorities because he had been mistaken for the other Colonel Gray. Thord had no idea, however, as to whether [this Gray] was identical to the Captain Newham Gray mentioned by Mr Hohler, as Thord was not privy to the secret letters that the embassy in Mexico had sent to the Foreign Office. Since Thord knew that Commander Gaunt had been informed about the confusion between the two Colonels Gray, he assumed that the matter was out in the open.

In the fall of 1916 Thord travelled to Canada with the aim of finding work there. Thord's application for an appointment prompted the Canadian authorities to make inquiries about him. The War Office wrote to the Canadian security service in Ottawa. Its letter made the usual judgements: Thord did not use methods that were generally acceptable to the British Army, and as a mercenary he was likely to be loyal to those who had last paid him, even though this did not necessarily prove a lack of loyalty toward British interests.

This accusation placed Thord in the grey zone. The Canadian authorities considered Thord's application for a while then gave him an evasive answer. Disappointed, Thord returned to New York. Time and again his offers of help had been declined, Bojerud notes:

Thanks to warnings from two friends in England, Thord had been made aware that the British suspected him of being a spy and that he was not welcome back in Great Britain, and he therefore wrote a letter to the War Office asking for an explanation as to why he was a suspect.

The War Office replied, reassuring Thord that his loyalty had never been questioned and that he was indeed welcome to return to Great Britain whenever he chose. Reassured, Thord tried to interest the War Office in his services as intelligence agent in Mexico and sent a memorandum on the situation in that country. The War Office's reply, however, was once again friendly but evasive.

Thord was unaware that American intelligence had confidential information concerning German activities in Mexico. The 'Zimmermann Telegram', despatched

on 16 January 1917, had been intercepted and decoded: in it the German foreign ministry instructed their ambassador in Mexico to encourage that country to start a war with the US. The ambassador could offer economic and material support to Mexico if it did so, and Germany pledged to restore Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas to Mexico's control after the war.

War between Mexico and the US would suit Germany as it contemplated resumption of its U-boat onslaught on 10 February 1917.



Thord reported his observations and experiences during his visit to Mexico in three secret reports. On 1 October 1916 he wrote to Major Andrew Moses, Army War College, Washington, DC, and on 1 November to Major-General George Bell (Jr), US Army, El Paso, Texas. After arriving in New York he sent the third report to the adjutant-general, US Army, Washington, DC. He reported that he had travelled to most of the country except the northwest and south.

He had visited most of his old comrades from the revolution in high office and explained what total idiots they had been concerning the US. He did not wish to see them at war, at least until the European war had ended or until their ammunition depots were filled.

He was received with open arms by all except Obregon, who was, however, truly diplomatic in his anti-American stand. He was offered a new higher command in the army, which of course he could not accept when the Germans were doing their best through propaganda to force Mexico into war with the US. It was of little importance to speak of the general strategic and tactical situation, or of the Mexican Army's deployment. The army was scattered into the different states, with a tendency to deploy greater numbers in the northern central states and in the western part of the country.

A kind of national service was under way and was developing well all over the country. Children aged ten and upwards exercised every day with only one aim in sight: to combat *gringos*.

The Constitutional Army was around 130 000 men strong. In the event of war with a foreign power the Citizens' Army could raise another 250 000 men with some kind of weapons. This Citizen's Army included Zapatistas, Villaistas and others, but not the Constitutional Army. They had about 2 000 cartridges per rifle. There were 140 machine guns with fairly good supplies of ammunition. Ammunition had without doubt been smuggled into the country in one way or another in rather large amounts and had been placed in different locations in the mountains. This activity had begun two months previously and was top secret.

Mexico had around twenty-four mixed field-batteries (comprising four pieces each) but the ammunition was inadequate. Zapatistas were gaining strength in the south because of Zapata handing out silver instead of the useless paper money. Constant destruction of railway tracks was taking place south of Mexico City as well as in Veracruz. Zapatistas had about four thousand men outside Veracruz and ten thousand outside Mexico City and maybe six thousand in other places.

They claimed to be forty thousand strong but Thord had cut his estimates to fifty percent of the numbers he had been given. Zapata and Villa were in constant touch with each other. The former lacked ammunition and got most of his stock from prisoners or through buying from Carranza deserters. Without the slightest doubt German influence was exercised everywhere in Mexico. German propaganda had been and still was thorough.

It had influenced the minds of almost all the leaders, in many cases through personal influence, or indirectly through the pro-German press. Thord did not want to speak too much on the subject as his audience might think he had a preconceived opinion.

General Klaus, a German who falsely claimed to have been born in Mexico, was in charge of the old ammunition factory in Mexico. It was estimated that it could deliver twenty thousand cartridges daily.

Obregon and Pablo Gonzales were deadly enemies and if Obregon could only be sure of getting Travino and one or two others on his side, he would try to kick Pablo Gonzales out, because he was afraid of him. Pablo Gonzales was well liked by almost all foreigners in Mexico whereas Obregon was disliked, but Thord thought nevertheless that he was the stronger man.

Obregon had influenced various army appointments and some political nominations to suit his own purposes. In this way he had weakened Carranza's power deviously. The latter did not have any troops under his direct command except for Pablo Gonzales' force, and he also suffered from lack of ammunition due to Obregon's machinations.

It was Obregon who had forced Carranza's clique to adopt an aggressive policy towards the US. Gonzales constituted the conservative element.

The country was tired of the money issue. The gold dollar that had been worth two pesos now cost 200 pesos and there was widespread general discontent. Movements were at hand for a great chess game of some kind, and it was undoubtedly the presence of US troops in Mexico that, on the whole, seemed to keep the various factions together.

Thord thought that there would be a more or less co-ordinated, general resistance everywhere in Mexico against US troops in the event of an intervention. In spite of the country's exhausted condition, they would come up against fearlessness, skilled fighters, and a certain measure of firmness in guerilla fighting, which might well surprise many people in the United States. Jealousy between the different chiefs, Mexico's curse, would eventually come to hinder every serious effort at resistance when it came to really big battles after the US had recovered from the first two or three defeats.

Thord's third letter (addressed to the adjutant-general of the army) warned:

I did not want to come across as a spreader of panic but I feel it my duty to warn you (if by chance you did not already know) that a great movement is underway in Mexico, inspired and led by Germans, which necessitates quick action through deployment of troops for defence in the oilfields in Tampico and Tuxpan. Carranza's proclamation for change in the Mexican constitution in Querétaro

'A great movement is underway in Mexico, inspired and led by Germans,' Thord warned the US Army.

a few days ago was a German move to give him a free hand to deal with foreigners (Americans and Britons) and their property, especially 'oil' and 'mines'. . . . I was chief of staff with General Lucio Blanco during the revolution in 1913–1914, so I know many of their artful plans in case of war.

Thord gave a detailed description of the situation in Mexico and its relationship to the US in a rough copy of a letter to a Mr Simmonds on 5 March 1917. It reported that he had travelled to Mexico in July 1916, and was taken prisoner twice by bandits. Fortunately these had belonged to his force during the Revolution and they released him after having 'divested' him of everything in a friendly way. He explained that it was impossible for the British ambassador in Mexico to make personal contact with the Mexican chiefs without help. One had to know the rotten element that from time to time dominated.

It was due to that kind of influence that his own personal friendship with those men could – in spite of the strong German dominance – stop the gathering of all Mexican forces against the American column under General Pershing. The Germans were behind this manoeuvre. Their plan to force a war between US and Mexico had several aims:

- a) To burn the British oilfields in Tampico and Tuxpan upon which the Royal Navy was so dependent;
- b) To put a stop to the shipment of war supplies to the Allies from the US, as a war would absorb all the ammunition and raw material for domestic use;
- c) To enable them to wage unlimited submarine warfare without American interference, thereby disrupting the supply of other goods to England.

Mexico's standing army was at the moment double the size of the US Army. In sixty days the Mexican army could increase its strength to four hundred thousand men with many hundreds of German officers. Thousands of Germans would join this army after crossing the border from the US.

The Mexican and the American Governments had demanded that they should take steps to protect the oilfields of Tampico and Tuxpan.

Thord imagined that something had been done.

He analysed aspects of Mexico's new constitution, its positive significance for the Germans, and its negative significance for other states.

He described how Carranza had taken over the National and London Bank in Mexico and sacked all the British and French owners' employees. Furthermore, he had taken nine million dollars of the thirty-nine million of the reserves in the bank vaults. By and by, without doubt, he would come to take the rest.

Thord was of the opinion that the entire American nation was prepared with weapons to unite with the Allies. It also seemed that the Senate would approve the 'Armed Neutrality Bill', but at the last minute this was prevented by filibustering.

His opinion was that these arch-pacifists were German agents. One of them said in fact that he would not fight even if the Germans came over and effected a landing of troops.

‘Such a man could only be a coward or a German.’

If the rest of the Senate had been men or at least true Americans they would have kicked out the pro-Germans.

Thord also mentioned that he had offered the adjutant-general, US Army, his services in case of war, and declared his willingness to form a regiment. The ex-president, Theodore Roosevelt, had offered Thord a position if he got permission to organise a division.

‘The question of citizenship was then brought up and it would become difficult, as I want to avoid becoming an American after what has happened the last few days. I have offered my services from this side on many occasions to the London WO but until now without any success.’

‘I woke up with something dripping on my blankets and found that my hosts had hanged two men in my honour on the telegraph pole.’

In pencil Thord noted on this draft: ‘Probably a lot was written about this in my previous letter but it cannot be helped as I feel strongly concerning the American issue and have to let off steam.’

The adjutant-general confirmed in a letter on 6 March 1917 that he had received Thord’s letter with its enclosure and thanked him for the offer of service. Thord’s letter would be answered and would be on file if the War Department needed his services. The information that Thord had supplied concerning the conditions in Mexico was fully appreciated.

Thord described his capture by bandits during his Mexico visit later in a letter to his friend Midgely from South Africa.

‘My company was captured by one of the many criminal bandit gangs – murdering and stealing all they can get their hands on. I thought my day had come when a part of the gang came rushing toward me, but they took me in their arms and kissed me on both cheeks. Bless their souls, they were some of my old soldiers from the revolution of 1913 and they had recognised me. There was nothing in the world that they would not do for me. They escorted me to the closest town but did not want to allow me to enter it that evening because they intended to have some fun there.

‘I arranged my campsite beside a telegraph pole and went to sleep very tired around midnight.

‘I woke up with something dripping on my blankets and found that my hosts had hanged two men in my honour on the telegraph pole – it was drizzling and drops of rain from these bodies had woken me up. I must have been very tired not to hear the others coming to hang these men during the early hours.’



While Thord busied himself with his other project: recruiting volunteers in the US for the Theodore Roosevelt Division, MI5 began to change its mind about him. In a memorandum dated 22 March 1917 it noted that Thord’s reports on the Mexican situation to their embassy in Washington had proved very valuable. Bojerud elaborates in *Soldier under 13 Banners*:

Thord was still regarded to be unreliable, but very useful. It was noted that he had an almost unique insight into what was going on behind the curtains in Mexico and was the best source on offer in that region.

On 27 March 1917 Thord wrote again to the adjutant-general, US Army, expressing the wish of his volunteer recruits to 'assist in the defence of the flag and the country that has adopted us':

I have started a preparatory registration of all Britons in the US who are willing to take part in a British-American regiment or a brigade to serve US in case of war. Hundreds of applications from Britons, all eager to serve, flow in daily from all directions. I herewith ask to offer you these men's unconditional service to fight for the United States wherever you wish to send them.

In case of war and after necessary training, we ask to be sent to Europe as a part of the United States expeditionary force. Should this not be desirable, we shall go anywhere else or act for home defence or as military police.

With more than a thousand men currently at my disposal and numerous applications coming in with every mail, I herewith ask for authority in case of war to set up an infantry regiment with or without a depot organisation. As I expect up to ten thousand men, this regiment could form the base of a British-American brigade. To the adjutant and deputy I ask you kindly to send me two active officers and as many warrant officers as can be spared from the regular personnel establishment. If more active officers can be spared, I kindly ask permission to utilise them. As deputy I take the liberty of proposing Major HE Eames at 32nd Inf. Reg. stationed at Schofield Barracks Hawaii Ter.

Whether any appeal in the press or elsewhere caused the influx of applications is not clear. But Thord sent out his own circular letter to those with whom he was in touch. In it he raised many questions concerning salary, pension, indemnifications, and uniforms, etc. He explained that he was not recruiting any men at the moment. Therefore no one should quit his employment or go to register until the right moment. As soon as Thord received orders from Washington, he would send instructions as to what had to be done. He exhorted the recipients not to worry if it took a while as the organisational work alone required time.

What was ongoing was not only preparations for quick official registration and organisation when the time was right. He was also working on brochures for Britons and British descendants in the US who were willing to form a corps to defend the flag of the country that had adopted them.

Naturally, after he had contacted the US Army on 27 March concerning the volunteer project, the Americans checked up on Thord via their military attaché in London, who was advised by the War Office that the US Government should not have anything further to do with Thord as he had a bad reputation in Britain.

Innocent of all this, Bojerud points out, Thord continued to recruit volunteers for Roosevelt's division, until the US, influenced by the Zimmermann Telegram and the sinking by a German U-boat of the RMS Lusitania, declared war against Germany on 4 April 1917.

On 24 April 1917 the adjutant-general announced that no law allowed military service for volunteer organisations.

After Germany had declared unrestricted submarine war on 31 January 1917 – and its diplomatic relations with the US had been cut on 4 February – it was clear that the question of the US's participation in the war was only a matter of time. German strategy was based on winning the submarine war before the US could organise a military power of decisive significance. It was with the intention of speeding up such a force that Roosevelt's and Thord's volunteer units were proposed. But President Wilson thought differently.

On 21 May 1917 Theodore Roosevelt wrote to the volunteers – after the President had refused to allow the organisation of the divisions that the congress had earlier approved:

As good American citizens we loyally obey the decision of America's supreme commander. Our only aim is, in all possible ways, to help to continue the war successfully, and we can honestly say that no one's private interest would take precedence over the general interest.

We rejoice too that a division consisting of our fine regular soldiers and naval soldiers shall be sent abroad under such a fearless and efficient leader as General Pershing. We have the right to a certain satisfaction in connection with this.

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle reported from a reliable source:

The dispatch of this expedition was a compromise between the General Staff's original plans recommending an early expedition and Colonel Roosevelt's demand for authority to send an immediate expedition. The Roosevelt movement, backed by an expressed wish from such prominent military leaders as Generals Joffre and Petain, undoubtedly influenced the realisation of the Pershing expedition. The compromise was that France got American soldiers in the entrenchments, but Roosevelt was not to lead or accompany them.

They thought in Washington that every criticism for rejecting Roosevelt would be outweighed by the fact that American soldiers had been sent overseas. If this was the explanation, then I can say with delight that we all are unselfishly satisfied with having served the purpose, although of course we regret that we are not allowed to do active service.

We owe a lot to the men that came forward in this question during the three and a half months since 2 February, when I started the work of setting up one or more divisions and the following facts became known.

If my offer to set up four divisions for immediate use at the front had been approved yesterday, then the different units in the first division would have begun to gather tomorrow on the locations specified by the War Department. They would have assembled in full strength and without an hour's delay as soon as the War Department decided where they should go – and furnished them with camping ground, tents, blankets, and so on.

We were prepared (by using partly private funds) to cover every immediate lack of such provisions that many of the units faced. Fifteen days later the other division would have been mobilised in a similar way and thereafter at intervals of thirty days, the other two divisions. According to what I found to be our Allied military authorities' wishes, the divisions would have

been ready to be shipped to France for intensive training on the war front within thirty days if the War Department was able to provide equipment, and we would have had to ask for permission to use rifles and ammunition that are now being used in the French and British armies.

All four divisions would have been shipped and two would have been in the front line on 1 September at the time when the secretary of war acknowledged that the gathering of 'the selective draft army' should start. Around half of our men, at least those in the first division, had already done their military duty. I wish, with respect, to pinpoint some errors that the President had been enticed into in his announcement. He alleged that the purpose was to give me independent command. In my latest letter to the Secretary of War, I emphasised respectfully that if I had consented to set up an army corps of two divisions under the command of a general like Wood or Pershing or Barry or Kuhn, for my part I wished only the position of junior among the eight brigadier chiefs.

My position would have been exactly the same as theirs with the exception that I should have been ranked after and been subordinated to the others.

The President hinted that our offer would have a 'political' effect but would not contribute to any success in the war or constitute a 'line of action to win personal satisfaction or advantage'. I respectfully but vigorously deny that any form of political contemplation or some wish for personal satisfaction or advantage was included in our calculations. Our full and total purpose was to efficiently contribute to success in the war.

I know nothing of the political opinions of the vast majority of men that came forward, and among those whose opinions I was aware of there were as many Democrats as Republicans. My purpose was to make it possible for the government to use the men as an invaluable military asset that could not be targeted under 'the selective draft'. These men were suitable for immediate service; otherwise most of them would not be used.

As has been emphasised above, if the War Department could have furnished them, all four divisions would have been sent to help our hard-pressed Allies before the training of 'the selected draft army' had even begun. Moreover, they would not have been exposed at the firing line until the French and British authorities judged them competent.

The President, in fact, says that considering our offer would have been damaging from a military point of view, and he added that the staff officers that I had required to utilise are some of the regular army's most efficient officers that 'could not possibly be spared from the task of training a regular troop'. One of the most important qualities for military command is to be able to choose one's associates and subordinates among the most efficient officers. The President states that in this case I have this quality.

As for sparing them from more pressing and necessary training of a troop, I want to point out that I had requested around fifty active officers from lieutenant-colonel to warrant lieutenants for the first division. This would only be a tenth of the number that would take part in General Pershing's division, which consists exclusively of regular personnel according to the President's statements. The present plan would therefore take from 'the most pressing and necessary service' about ten times as many staff officers as would have been used in our suggestion. It has been stated that the active officers oppose our plan.

In fact, 'the most effective' fighting officers have been eager to be connected to or to get command over the units we want to organise. The President adjudges our suggestion on the basis that it needs 'non-dramatic' action with 'practical and scientific clarity and precision'. There is

nothing dramatic in our suggestion except that all our suggestions convey eagerness or willingness to sacrifice life for an ideal.

It is true that our division would probably have contained the sons or grandsons of civil war veterans who belonged to the blue or to the gray; for example the sons or the grandsons of Phil Sheridan; Fitz Hugh Lee; Stonewall Jackson; James A Garfield; Simon Bolivar Buckner; Adna R Chaffee; Nathan Bedford Forest. But these men would have done service as commanders in the line like the rest of us; and all would have been judged in the same way according to their efficiency – comprising ‘the scientific clarity’ with which they did their work and served their loyal devoted flag.’

On 25 May 1917 Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Thord, giving an account of his latest report to the President and the answer he received, and enclosing the letter quoted above, stating further:

I now relinquish you or your men. I wish to express my deep feeling of a debt of gratitude to you and to all those who voluntarily registered in connection with this unit.

As you know without doubt I am very proud of the Rough Riders, the first voluntary cavalry with which I served in the Spanish-American war. I believe that it is an important and truthful assertion of facts when I say that this regiment did as well as any of the excellent regular regiments with which I served in the Santiago campaign.

It was put together, armed, equipped, trained, mounted, demounted, was held two weeks onboard a cargo ship and accomplished two victorious attack battles in which they lost a third of their officers and a fifth of the men; all within sixty days from the time I got my command.

If the President had allowed me to set up the four divisions, I am sure that they would have answered to this merit list but on a hundred times greater scale. They would all have been in the line of fire before or shortly after ‘the draft army’ had started to gather; besides they would have been unlimitedly strengthened [to grow] continuously stronger and more efficient.

I regret from the country’s point that your services were not utilised.

But the country has every reason to be proud of the enthusiasm, patriotism, and experienced efficiency with which you came forward.

With all good wishes, sincerely yours

Theodore Roosevelt

President Woodrow Wilson’s unwillingness to support the volunteer project was not surprising in the light of the negative report on Thord from the War Office. (When the project was shelved, Thord had already recruited 3 500 men.) Wilson’s stand, however, also stems from the fact that he and Roosevelt were political opponents. Thord’s reputation soon came under attack from a new quarter:

Brigadier Francis Lyon, chief of staff for the 19th British Army corps in France, read a news report on Thord’s recruitment drive in the US and chose to report to the War Office that Thord had a poor reputation in the British Army; he had been kicked out of the 23rd Division in France; and irregularities had been detected in his past. Bojerud comments:

‘It is odd that General Lyon, who had never heard of Thord before he read the newspaper article, took it upon himself to indulge in pure slander.’

In the wake of General Lyon's attack, MI5 reassessed Thord and circumstantial questions began to pile up: He was a British citizen but travelled on a Mexican passport – and of course it was now known that the Germans were engaged in subversive activities in that country. Was Thord a German agent after all?

The US Bureau of Investigation (later the FBI) also began to interest itself in Thord. It sent a Detective McGee to interrogate him.

British intelligence, struggling to find evidence that Thord was working for the Germans, started making inquiries worldwide. In July 1917 it received a report from security services in Singapore that Thord was Swedish born and was actually named 'Hallestrom'. Furthermore, Thord's brother was in the Swedish Army where he cared for German interns. What surprised the security services was that the 'Hallestrom' family had a good reputation in Sweden. So why had Thord changed his name?

There was nothing wrong with the 'Hallestroms', so it followed that Thord was up to no good. Otherwise why would he have changed his name? But what was he up to? What skeleton lay in his cupboard?

Sweden was a German-friendly country and Thord's brother busied himself with Germans. This was grounds enough for suspicion: then there was the name change and the fact that Thord travelled on a Mexican passport. The 'Zimmermann Telegram' had cast suspicion on Sweden – and Thord was Swedish. Security services continued to search under every stone trodden on by Thord.

Thord now felt thoroughly thwarted and realised that he was being repeatedly obstructed by strong but invisible forces. As a last desperate measure on 13 July 1917 he wrote a seven-page letter to King George V. He also submitted two memoranda on his capacities as intelligence agent. The one dealt with Mexico and the other with Finland, where he adjudged the Allies to be driving the Finns into the arms of the Germans.

Thord's matter had now reached the attention of MI5 chief Sir Reginald Hall, who wrote to the mission in Singapore that no definitive evidence of Thord's disloyalty had come to light, but that in his letter to the king, Thord had mentioned neither his name change nor having worked in Singapore. This was grounds for suspicion. What else was Thord hiding? Bojerud comments:

For a present-day Swede it is difficult to imagine the virtual paranoid attitude that the British had towards Sweden in 1917. Besides the earlier-named 'Zimmermann Telegram' the British felt they had additional evidence that Sweden had actively helped the Germans.'

The British saw to it that their suspicions were published in September 1917, one week before Swedish parliamentary elections. The idea was to compromise the sitting Hammarskjöld government and influence opinion so that the Social Democrats under the leadership of Hjalmar Branting would win the elections. The Daily Express reported that a Swedish diplomat in Mexico had spied on Germany's behalf. Sweden's chargé d'affaires in Mexico City, Folke Cronholm, was identified as the German agent – and Thord had socialised with Cronholm.

On 8 October 1917, however, the War Office replied to Thord's letter to the king, assuring him that his loyalty was not under suspicion and emphasising that he could only be considered for a colonial appointment as his methods did not comply with those that were generally acceptable in the British Army. Unfortunately, there had been no suitable vacancy within the colonial forces.



Despite these forces working against him, Thord had become known in the US. Although he still felt the after-effects from his time spent on the front in Flanders – in the form of trench foot and heart problems, the first cured with flaxseed porridge, the latter with a prolonged country convalescence at the Canadian border – he remained fully active during 1917. One organisation after another invited him to deliver speeches on the war and the demands war would place on the country and its citizens. One example of this is a conference at the Twilight Club on 7 April where the topic was: 'War, a discussion of our plans for a national defence, our political nature, and the extent of our collaboration with the Allies in the Entente, the possibilities of victory, the likelihood of a near peace, and plausible terms for agreement.'

Apart from Thord, invited speakers included Dr Toyokichi Ivanaga, 'renowned spokesman for Japan in the US', Hudson Maxim, 'inventor, author, publisher, and member of the president's advisory council for sea missions', and CA Eaton, publisher of the *Toronto Globe* and president of the Canadian Society of New York.

On 21 April Thord was thanked by the British War Relief Association for his kindness in leading the parade, 'Wake Up, America,' on 19 April. He was congratulated on the 'beautiful sight his column presented when it came along the avenue'. On 17 May he was the guest of honour at the Canadian Society of New York City and on 22 May at The British Schools and University Club New York, where he was expected to speak.

After the question of volunteer units had been written off, engagements continued on the information and propaganda front.

The National Service Commission of New York City expressed their appreciation for the time and energy he spent on speaking for The Patriotic Service League. They gave prominence to the fact that the subsequent receipt of registration cards proved that Thord's words 'went home'.

Harvard Engineering Society of New York wrote on 23 November that the secretary had heard Thord's speech to the New York Electrical Society and wanted him to repeat it for the association: what Thord had addressed was of special interest to its members. A large number of their members were 'across the water', but none had until now come back to give the message as Thord did of the experience on the Western Front. The yearly meeting should be spent on the war with three or four speakers touching on different aspects of that subject.

On 16 November 1917 Thord gave the Grew-Hills publishing company his work 'Attack and Defence in Trench Warfare' and sent copies to leading personalities. 'It contained detailed instructions and rules which the author had

given officers and men during his command when he was on active duty and covered every phase of their activity.’ Among those who acknowledged receipt and gave thanks were: The White House; Theodore Roosevelt; the adjutant-general, Washington; the secretary of war, Washington; the Secretary of the Navy, Washington; the Commanding General, Camp Dix, New Jersey; Headquarters Southeastern Department, Charleston, South Carolina; Headquarters 101st Division, Camp Shelby, Miss.; Headquarters Western Department, San Francisco, Cal.; Sir Douglas Haig, General Headquarters British Armies in France; Lord French, C-in-C Home Forces; Department of Militia and Defense, Ottawa, Canada; Chief of The Imperial General Staff, London.

On the contract with the publishers Thord noted. ‘Only around 100 000 copies were printed. It was stopped at the request of the British Embassy, Washington. They were afraid that the book had revealed too many secrets – d... fools!’

On 16 November Thord received what he called a tough request from the War Committee of Technical Societies in New York. They hoped to be able to duplicate the good work that they understood had been done by the ‘invention boards’ of England and France so that their members would get something concrete to work on. They suggested that he send them brochures, each one describing some special phase of modern war and thus drawing conclusions as to where improvements of old methods or new inventions would be most welcome.

What they wanted from Thord was material for a brochure of thirty to forty pages along given lines that would, among other things, deal with:

- ❖ An updated description of trench warfare especially calculated to give the reader a clear, vivid picture of what modern warfare really is;
- ❖ A description of different kinds of trenches as fixed by the service demands, topography, and local conditions;
- ❖ Defensive methods in trench warfare;
- ❖ Offensive methods in trench warfare, including missiles, construction of tunnels, drilling, and pipe driving devices;
- ❖ Trench periscope and sound detection apparatus for trenches, observation posts, and tunnels;
- ❖ Trench connections and their use for defensive purposes in emergencies;
- ❖ Portable tramways for forwarding ammunition and provisions;
- ❖ Heating and cooking equipment, footwear, and clothes for service in the trenches.

Thord’s varied knowledge of the topic enabled him to add items that did not seem obvious to a civilian. They counted on his work being of great importance for the cause and at the same time it served as excellent advertisement for his book about trench warfare. The draft of Thord’s response to this request exists only as an incomplete five-page document. He developed the outline according to their expressed wishes under the headings Trenches; Fire Trenches; Cover Trenches; Wire Entanglement; Listening Posts; and Alarm and Signals.



Adversity still dogged Thord into 1918, however: Despite the War Office's assurance in October 1917 that his loyalty was not under suspicion, Thord experienced more obstruction to his appointment as chief military speaker for the US Shipping Board on 1 February 1918: Colonel Van Demen, Chief Military Intelligence Branch US Army, cited the British military attaché in Washington DC as saying that Thord had a bad reputation, even though there was no evidence that he lacked loyalty.

Thord's eventual clearance by MI5 and British security services in New York had apparently not reached the embassy and consulate.

On 15 March 1918 the matter of Thord came to the attention of National Services chief Dr Charles Eaton, along with the proposal that Thord be dismissed from the US Shipping Board.

Dr Eaton, grounded as jurist, was also a good friend of Thord and took it upon himself to do his own research and then to contact the British security services in New York. Colonel Hunter, Assistant Provost Marshal, wrote a very positive assessment of Thord.

It is likely that Commander Hopkins had explained that there were two Colonels Gray, that Thord was not the German agent, and that the other Gray, the true agent, had since disappeared from the spotlight.

Thord, his name cleared, could therefore continue his work as travelling propagandist and security controller for the US Shipping Board. But he would again be dogged by suspicion.

At least MI5 had helped Thord survive WWI by obstructing his bids for active service, Bojerud comments wryly.



'Invisible enemy' notwithstanding, Thord's persistence prevailed: Throughout 1918 Thord was continually invited to give lectures on the war and war preparations. On 12 February the Board of Trade, New Brunswick, New Jersey, prepared a political mass meeting and wanted Thord as speaker. They also wanted him to reserve days in March for a continued campaign. The Liberty Loan Committee in New York was behind it. On 22 January they invited him to speak in North Dakota and appeal especially to the Scandinavians in this state to stimulate their loyalty and feelings of duty during war.

The president of the US Chamber of Commerce wrote to Thord on 28 March 1918 that the chamber's meeting in Chicago from 10 to 12 April should be an important contribution to the country's war preparations. The second day would be spent totally on reflecting on how the men of trade and industry could help to expedite the government's ship building programme. It was expected that two thousand or more of the country's representative businessmen would come to this meeting. Speeches should be given by speakers with national and international reputations. The president was eager to have Thord as speaker and added that this would give Thord an opportunity to convey his message, which was seldom heard in this country.

Thord had previously been connected with the work of promoting US shipbuilding, which was of such importance in the war effort and provided a counterweight against submarine warfare. He had been associated with the US Shipping Board as chief military speaker. Already at the end of March, the National Service Section of this Shipping Board announced that Thord's work had been of the greatest value in speeding up shipbuilding and in educating the American people to comprehend the war's real problems. For his appearances as chief military speaker he had permission to wear the uniform of lieutenant-colonel of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

For security reasons, the chief of the National Service Section turned to the British Assistant Provost Marshal (the British military police representative in the US) and asked about Thord. The answer was satisfactory:

'Colonel Gray has had a very vast and varied military experience. He should be considered as totally qualified to lecture as a representative for the US Shipping Board.... His military service record is excellent and his experience so extensive that it would be impossible for me, within the frame of this letter, to do justice to his service.... Accordingly the reports about him have been good from this office and from each and everyone that had to do with him officially in US. He has been given official authority from this office to carry his corps uniform and he has been placed on the approved list of lecturers. Without going into detail, I cannot give him any better recommendation than this because it means that we have thoroughly examined every detail of his career as well as his present occupation and conduct.... There has never been anything and there is at present nothing officially against Colonel Gray but a great amount officially to his advantage, as far as this office is aware. I understand that he has been attacked on different occasions by people that do not know of him. This office has always supported Colonel Gray and as long as his future testimonials are as good as those of the past, you and he ought to be able to trust that we are ready to certify that he is a soldier with a prominent and honourable past.'

Thord's contribution as chief military speaker for US Shipping is well documented through one hundred more or less detailed accounts of his speeches and reports on his appearances in the American press. The first took place in Minnesota (Minneapolis, St Paul, and Duluth) and Ohio (Cleveland) during January; thereafter on the east coast shipping yards in Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey (Boston, Quincy, New York, Plainfield, and Newark) mainly during February. After an interlude in Oregon (Portland) he was back on the east coast in New York, Maryland, and Connecticut (New York, Baltimore, and New London) during March. He spent most of April and May on the west coast in Oregon, Washington, California (Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Spokane) with detours to Vancouver and then to Illinois (Chicago) in the middle of April and a final visit to Pennsylvania (Bethlehem) in the middle of September 1918. Some of Thord's appearances before various associations were apparently in connection with the shipbuilding campaign. They included invitations to speak to the Commonwealth Club of California on 30 April in San

Francisco and Spokane's Chamber of Trade and Commerce on 22 May. Even the Liberty Loan Committees in different locations used him as lecturer or in some other way. Thus the chairman of the West Orange (NJ) Liberty Loan Committee thanked Thord for a letter about the general war situation, which he described as a masterly presentation on the subject. The committee would use it in their education plans and only wished that Thord could be with them daily to convey these words in his powerful rhetoric.

Backed by recommendations from Assistant Provost Marshall Colonel Hunter and Dr Eaton, Thord secured a position in the Canadian Army at the end of 1918.

The end of Thord's involvement in shipbuilding propaganda was lamented on 16 October 1918, by Charles Eaton in his role as Chairman of the National Service Section, US Shipping Board.

Dear Colonel Gray,

I deeply regret that you are moving from New York and that in this way we are losing your services as Chief Military Speaker for the National Service Section, US Shipping Board.

Allow me to thank you for the fine service you have done throughout this country, not only to speed up ship production but also to create a better understanding between the people of the British Commonwealth and America. While I regret that you are leaving us, I congratulate you on your task at the front.

As I know that your health has improved and you have been in active service as a soldier for so long, I can well understand how pleased you are to once again be able to return to the front.

Let us hear from you from time to time.

It was only years later that MI5 would see fit to explain their largely circumstantial grounds for mistrusting Thord: An MI5 representative visited him at the Bachelors' Club in London after the Russian Civil War and finally explained that the security services had suspected him due to variations in his name, citizenship, and place of birth. His first name had been recorded as Ivor, Iver, Ior, and Ivan Thurd; his last name as Gray, Grey, Thord-Grey, and Thord-Gray. Furthermore he had travelled on various passports: British, Mexican, Swiss, and Swedish. Finally his birthplace had been given variously as Stocklerton and Itrellohe, neither of which existed.

Thord could explain that since 1897 he had been a British citizen and possessed a British passport. He had never been a Mexican citizen, but possessed a Mexican passport on the strength of being an officer in the Mexican Army and used it on trips to and from the country. He used a Swedish passport nowadays because the British Consulate General in New York had refused to renew his British passport. Regarding the strange information on different names and places of birth; this should be attributed to sloppy passport control. That he had changed his name to Gray was due to Englishmen's inability to pronounce Hallström. Thord had tired of explaining his name repeatedly. The last word in this arduous chapter of Thord's life goes to Bojerud: 'This account of Thord's life between 1916 and 1918 could seem to have been taken from Franz Kafka's novel *Processen*, but as we know, fiction is sometimes surpassed, as in this case, by reality.'

SWEDEN AND FINLAND

THORD OFTEN said the ultimate aim of his participation in so many wars was to be ready to serve Sweden if the land of his ancestors ever became involved in a war. When the Russian Revolution spread to Finland during the winter of 1918 and their liberation war began, he was prepared to fulfill his promise. Finland had been part of the Russian Empire, but declared itself independent after the collapse of Czarist Russia in 1917.

An attempt was made to foment a Bolshevik-inspired revolution in Finland, led by the Social Democrats and supported by Soviet Russia. This was opposed by conservative elements within Finland, supported by Germany and Finland's Baltic neighbours, among them Sweden.

A bloody civil war was fought in 1918 between two paramilitary forces, the Red and White Guards. Thord was in Washington when he received a postcard dated 16 April from his mother in Stockholm.

I have opened my rooms as a bureau for The Swedish Brigade, whose brave lads you surely must have read about in the newspapers. Gustaf is in charge of it all. He cannot go out himself but he works day and night for this cause. Unfortunately many fine lives have been lost.

On 10 June Thord wrote a confidential letter to the British Military Attaché in Washington. He mentioned the involvement in the Swedish Brigade of his brother Gustaf, an archeologist and Swedish Red Cross volunteer in Russia and Siberia during the first years of the war.

To Thord it seemed obvious that a movement was underway in Sweden to liberate its neighbour and prevent Finland from being invaded by Germany. (Actually the situation was more complicated than this, because the real aim of the Swedish Brigade was to save Finland from Bolshevism and Russian aggression – so they were on the same side as Germany in this conflict.) Such a movement must, according to Thord, already have support in official circles: this was proved by the fact that a volunteer troop could be organised by his brother in Stockholm. Thord took the liberty of hinting that he could possibly be of some service in this regard.

Born and brought up in Sweden and with many influential friends and relatives there, he could now feasibly return there as a disabled officer in the British army, spread discreet propaganda, and take such steps as the British Government might find appropriate under the present circumstances. He thought the time was ripe to enlighten the Swedish people about the looming threat and impress on them the necessity of resistance to German influence. The Swedish people were taught from childhood to detest both Germans and Russians. Nevertheless during the last four years the Germans had made real efforts to become popular in Sweden, so that in some areas they had created pro-German feelings. Such sentiments, he felt, had to be fought. A patriotic national policy had to be encouraged among the people. In a country like Sweden this could be done successfully only by one who had been born and bred there, and especially by one who had taken an active part

in the present war. Thord would be only too happy to resign from his post as Chief Military Speaker for the US Shipping Board, which the American Government had kindly given him, to take on the task in Sweden in accordance with whatever instructions he was given.

On the copy of this letter Thord noted: 'They agreed and then I changed my mind and eventually went to Siberia with the Canadians.'

Thord did not relinquish the thought of Finland's destiny. He apparently spent a lot of time during the summer of 1918 following up on what was happening on the peripheries of the Russian Revolution. He became more and more worried by the policy that the Allies adopted towards Finland.

On 15 September he completed an eleven-page 'Memorandum on Finland', which he intended to send to Lloyd George in England, President Wilson in US, and Clemenceau in France. In the introduction he explained his motives for writing the document: Knowledge about Finland was lacking and many had requested that he write about it. He was doing so, he said, to help and not to find fault or criticise. He also explained his Nordic background.

The Allies did not know the true nature of the Finns nor did they understand their history or the current situation as it existed on the ground.

Through this lack of awareness, they had temporarily thrown the Finns into German arms. The Allies had made many mistakes in Finland and used the excuse that the country was pro-German. But a year earlier the country's pro-German attitude had been very limited. That this feeling had grown stemmed foremost from British and American actions and omissions in not recognising Finland's sovereignty, or at least reassuring the country of its independence after the end of the war. This had of course provoked Finland's negative attitude to Great Britain and the US.

He considered it a blunder to have allowed this feeling to prevail.

Thord then explained how the regent, Pehr Svinhufvud, had been driven towards a pro-German stance by force of circumstances and the Allies' neglect. It had to be remembered that Germany's intervention had come to be looked upon not only as salvation from anarchism and disintegration, but as a sincere attempt to help Finland to greater national autonomy. Their own national interest was and ought to be the Finns' foremost priority.

The next segment of Thord's memorandum dealt with Finland's choice of parliament under the Kerensky regime. After the October Revolution of 1917, sentiment had changed from socialist to conservative and the socialists had revolted against the elected government in order to work hand in hand with the Bolsheviks. Lenin and Trotsky supported the rebels with troops, weapons, and ammunition, even though only a month earlier they had recognised the Finnish Republic. With that, the civil war erupted.

Faced with disaster, the government was forced to ask for help from abroad in the form of war supplies. The Allies were asked first but were unable to reach Finland, while Sweden (which was asked next) refused owing to its neutrality. Nevertheless a little help was given.

The Swedish Brigade, organised by Thord's brother, was sent over and fought for Finland's independence. Other than that, the Finns found themselves blockaded from all directions.

Of course the Germans did not waste the opportunity. As soon as the Allies failed to answer Finland's call for help, they recognised Finland's independence. At the beginning of April Germany shipped 100 000 rifles and large amounts of ammunition to Vasa and delivered provisions to the starving Finns in the north. After that, the White Guards were able slowly to force their way forward, defeat their opponents, and crush the uprising.

Through their quick response to Finland's difficulties, the Germans had of course earned Finnish gratitude and were very careful not to risk the good relations that had been created. In this they showed understanding of the Finnish national character. It would have been good if the Allies had tried to duplicate this. However, the Germans then exerted pressure on Finland to change into a constitutional monarchy and choose a German prince as ruler.

If they were to succeed in this against the wishes of the Finnish people, the Allies would to a great extent have only themselves to blame.

Thord queried whether Finland was really pro-German or not – and answered his own question with both a yes and a no. Finland's plea for help to Germany had been comparable to a drowning man grasping at straws. Nonetheless there were some pro-German feelings in Finland. When the country had been deprived by Russia of the last remnants of its independence in November 1914, and the other Allies had done nothing to help, a number of men had decided to offer their services to the German army, provided that they would not be sent to the Western Front. Only one enemy threatened Finland's existence: the Russian autocracy. When the Russian Revolution broke out, these Finns no longer wanted to fight and they were transported by the Germans to prison camps. They were freed when the Red Guards began the civil war in Finland and were allowed to return to their native country.

Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, especially under the Brobikov regime, Finland's suffering had become impossible to bear and silent resistance had been mounting against the Russian oppressors. When the Allies, including Russia, met at the outbreak of war in August 1914, they made a declaration upholding the rights of small nations. The Finns, of course, hoped that the Tsar would give them a fair deal. Instead, conditions became much worse.

Most Finns wanted Germany to defeat Russia, not so much because they were pro-German, but because they had lived and suffered under the despotism of Russian bureaucracy for many years. Their wish was natural. Whether General Carl Mannerheim, the Whites' commander-in-chief, was pro-German Thord did not know. He was a true Finn and thought first of his country's welfare. He would protect Finland's independence by all means possible. One had to remember, Thord said, that the Finns, like the Russians, had practically no communication with the outside world and thus did not know what was happening, except for what they learned through Bolshevik and German sources.

Owing to skilled German propaganda, the Finns thought that Germany had given them three major things: Recognition as a sovereign state; weapons and ammunition to crush anarchy, rebellion, and invasion; and thirdly, provisions for the starving population.

Compare this with what the Allies had done for Finland and it was understandable that the Finns were sceptical about the Allies' attitude towards Finland. According to the Finns, the Allies had failed them on major issues:

- ❖ They had not recognised Finland's sovereignty;
- ❖ They denied Finland weapons and ammunition;
- ❖ They had confiscated 40 000 tons of grain, which had been bought and paid for a year earlier;
- ❖ They had neglected to return the money after the grain had been confiscated.

Great Britain and the United States, by refusing all moral and military help to the suffering Finnish nation in its crisis, had voluntarily put Germany in the position of Finland's benefactor, not to say saviour, and in this way created a debt of gratitude.

The Germans had made a convincing demonstration of military force, and they had tantalised the Finns with the vision of a greater Finland, which, under the protection of their irresistible power, would encompass Russian Karelia (which was ethnically Finnish), and maybe even the strip of coastal territory that the Russian Government had promised to exchange for some Finnish territory near Petrograd in 1825.

In his conclusion Thord tried to clarify what the Allies could do to counteract the Germans' work in Finland.

'What bodes ill for a good understanding between Finland and the Allies is that the Germans have an occupation army of two or more army corps in Finland. I have also come across reports that a treaty has been signed between Germany and Finland according to which all of Finland's military force should be at Germany's disposal. Such a treaty might have been signed by the Finnish Government, but it would not be valid in the eyes of the people if we only gave them a chance to do something.' Thord suggested that the Allies do the following:

- ❖ Give the pro-Allied Finns, as far as possible, the food they so greatly needed;
- ❖ Recognise Finland as a sovereign state;
- ❖ Organise the Finns that were willing to fight for the Allies; give them equipment, weapons and ammunition in every accessible location;
- ❖ Set up Finnish and Swedish units in America and send them to Finland.

This would show loyalty and commitment to the Finnish and Swedish people and stimulate local recruitment. The Finns and thousands of Swedish people would rush to the banners if Finland's sovereignty were guaranteed by the Allies. The measure would be the start of getting Sweden into the war on the Allies' side. Thord thought that the Allies ought to benefit from the great change that

had been taking place in Sweden during the last six to nine months. The three Scandinavian monarchies were facing the greatest crisis in their history. They would be compelled to go either for or against Germany. They should be helped to make the right choice.

It should not be forgotten that these countries had witnessed the fate of Belgium, Serbia, Northern France, Russia, and Rumania.

The value of having the Scandinavian countries on the Allied side could hardly be overestimated and everything should be done to get them to join the Allies. This could be done with the help of propaganda and personal contact with leaders and people, especially in Sweden.

Rallying Sweden to the Allied cause would make it easy for the Allied navies to enter the Baltic Sea, completely blockade the German Navy, and force it to fight – so that it could be destroyed before peace was declared.

The presence of the Allied fleet in the Baltic would also encourage the Russians, the Finns, and the Poles in their resistance against the Germans – and shift other neutral nations to the Allied side in the war.

No one could ignore the fact that Germany was working continually to widen its influence in Finland and Sweden and this had to be countered. The ability of Finland and Sweden to resist German efforts depended to a great extent on the Allies' attitude towards them. If Finland was excluded from material help, it would be forced into the arms of the enemy – permanently. This would also make it impossible for Sweden to help the Allied cause owing to the German occupation of Åland and Finland.

Thord ended his memorandum to the Allied leaders with these words: 'We must therefore make every effort to help Finland before it is all too late.'

