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David Bruce Dittmer
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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**THE FIRING OF ADMIRAL DENFELD: AN EARLY CASUALTY
OF THE MILITARY UNIFICATION PROCESS**

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

David Bruce Dittmer

April 1995

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Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Name

Department/School

Joseph Simon HIST/UNO

Orville D. Menard POL. SCI./UNO

D. W. Waldon HIST/UNL

Chairperson

Bruce W. Javer HIST/UNO

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ABSTRACT

The defense establishment of the United States underwent many changes after its magnificent victory in World War II. Budget cuts and a rapid demobilization that President Truman described as "disintegration" shrunk the Armed Forces to less than a quarter of their wartime strength in less than two years, just as the world's geopolitical landscape was hardening into the bi-polar relationship of the Cold War. Adding to the resulting confusion was Truman's successful effort to unify the three services in an overarching National Military Establishment which eventually became the Department of Defense.

The resulting pressures on the three military services led to a prolonged, acrimonious inter-service squabble over position, mission, and funding which often appeared to be merely selfish survivalism. Actually, the arguments which surfaced in the late 1940s over the various proposals for employing nuclear and conventional forces arose out of sincere and rational concerns for the best interests of the Nation.

Admiral Louis Denfeld served as the Chief of Naval Operations, the uniformed head of the Navy, from December 1947 through October 1949. He attempted to support the policies of President Truman in public statements, during congressional testimony, and in talks to his subordinates but was unable to satisfy all three groups. 1949 brought a new, economy-minded Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, to the Pentagon. Admiral Denfeld soon came into conflict with Johnson over the new Secretary's preference for the Air Force and strategic bombing over the Navy's aircraft carriers and tactical air operations. Johnson chose Francis P. Matthews, an Omaha lawyer, as Secretary of the Navy, making Denfeld's position even more difficult. Denfeld attempted to compromise and temporize his way through the resulting conflicts, but only succeeded in alienating both his superiors and his subordinates.

The deep-seated bitterness in the Navy over budgetary cuts and seemingly arbitrary restrictions boiled over in the summer of 1949, leading to Congressional hearings on military unification and national strategy. This bitter episode has become known as the "Revolt of the Admirals." Denfeld did not lead the "revolt." He tried to maintain a sense of discipline, albeit ineffectively. Eventually, he sided with the rebels in his testimony, and was promptly removed by Matthews, Johnson, and the President.

Congress, the media, and the public were divided on the removal of the Chief of Naval Operations. The House Armed Services Committee concluded that his firing had been a reprisal for his candid testimony before Congress and reacted angrily because this firing might discourage future military witnesses from providing honest and open testimony. The Senate Armed Services Committee also examined the firing of Admiral Denfeld but concluded that his testimony had not been the cause of his removal. This Committee agreed with Matthews' contention that many small matters over the course of several months had rendered the Admiral unsuitable for continued service as the Navy's senior officer. To date, no historical works about this incident have reconciled this difference of opinion.

This thesis attempts to show that Admiral Denfeld's Congressional testimony was only a symptom of the real cause of his firing. His inability to communicate effectively with his civilian bosses and to unify his subordinates in support of the administration led to an intolerable situation in the Navy. Matthews never publicly explained his rationale for removing his subordinate, but the Admiral's testimony was not the only cause of the Secretary of the Navy's decision. Both Matthews and Denfeld have been neglected by historians, generally being dismissed as the Navy's leaders in an embarrassing "family feud." Nevertheless, they were both patriotic Americans and deserve a better legacy. Their principal shortcoming was their inability to work effectively together.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the product of nearly two years of research and evaluation, and like all historical scholarship has been a collaborative effort. Archivists, librarians, historians, fellow officers, and many others helped to bring it to completion. I would like to acknowledge some of the individuals whose efforts helped me keep this project on track.

The Harry S. Truman Library's outstanding staff and facilities made my research in Independence, Missouri a pleasure. Sam Rushay and the other archivists were always willing and able to help in any way possible. A generous research grant from the Truman Library Institute also very much facilitated my efforts.

Washington, D.C.'s Naval Historical Center provided a wealth of essential information and scholarly advice. Dr. Jeffrey Barlow's help was especially appreciated, as was the fact that he allowed me to examine the manuscript of his then-unpublished book, The Revolt of the Admirals. The Center's fine collection of Admiral Denfeld's personal and professional papers was easy to work with and of great value to my project.

Various military organizations also deserve sincere thanks for their assistance. The staff of the U. S. Strategic Command in Omaha gave me the idea for this thesis and encouraged its development. The Command Historians, Dr. Robert Parks and Dr. Todd White, graciously led me through the archives of the Strategic Air Command and showed me the Air Force's side of the controversy. Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Holland, III, merits special thanks for granting me the time to complete this project.

Ms. Carol Ramkey of the Army's Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas provided essential assistance and went well beyond the normal call of duty in supplying copies of many articles and documents not available in the Omaha area. The Special Collections staff at the U. S. Naval Academy's Nimitz Library were very

helpful in guiding me through their extensive oral history collection and the Naval Academy's records. Dr. Al Goldberg of the Secretary of Defense's History Office also made his Pentagon files available for review.

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My biggest debt in this and all my other projects is to my loving wife Lauri and my forgiving children, Kathryn and Michael. They gave up their husband and father for many days to libraries, archives, and computers during the course of this project. Their love and patience was essential and will never be forgotten.

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INTRODUCTION

"Admiral Denfeld was ousted because of 'an accumulation of many small conflicts on policy making,' and not as the result of any one incident." (1950 news report of a statement by Senator Millard Tydings, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee)¹

"The removal of Admiral Denfeld was a reprisal against him for giving testimony to the House Armed Services Committee." (1950 House Report)²

This stark contrast in Congressional opinions on the cause of the October 1949 firing of the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Louis E. Denfeld, is one example of many passionate disagreements between all parties involved in the "Revolt of the Admirals." This "revolt" marked the low point in the struggle for position and influence between the armed services following their 1947 unification in the predecessor to today's Defense Department. Many senior officers of all services sincerely defended their often conflicting concepts of what the United States needed for national defense. Drastic cuts in military budgets and a growing Soviet threat at the start of the Cold War gave an even greater sense of urgency to this debate. Admiral Denfeld, traditionally a conciliator, decided on 27 October 1949 to take his stand at the head of the "revolting admirals" during a public Congressional inquiry into military unification and strategy. Two weeks later, President Truman, at the Secretary of the Navy's request, removed Denfeld from his position as the uniformed head of the Navy and as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a lack of "loyalty to superiors and respect for authority."³

¹"Denfeld Firing Probe Closes," Omaha World Herald, 31 January 1950, p. 1.

²U. S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Unification and Strategy. H. Doc. 600, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 56.

³Letter from Francis P. Matthews to President Truman, 27 October 1949, Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

Admiral Denfeld's removal punctuated the "revolt" and served as a catharsis for the Armed Forces. President Truman had selected him to be Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) for a two-year term starting 15 December 1947. Admiral Denfeld had thereafter led the Navy through the tumultuous battles of military unification and oversaw the dramatic draw down from its 1945 heyday. He set the Navy on a course to meet its Cold War responsibilities in the atomic age. Despite these and many other tangible achievements, most historical accounts have neglected, and the Navy has largely forgotten, Denfeld's unselfish performance of duty because of his enduring association with the embarrassing "Revolt of the Admirals." This attempt by naval officers to save their service from relegation to the second echelon in national defense backfired badly. Their allegations that the Air Force's weapons programs and strategic bombing doctrines were inflexible, ineffective, and immoral resulted in an emotional Congressional investigation. This investigation did not produce any immediate, tangible gains for the Navy and caused great concern and frustration among the leaders of the U. S. defense establishment. To them and to Congress and the public, the Armed Forces appeared to have sunk to a new low in petty bickering and undisciplined, inter-service rivalry. President Truman's dismissal of the Chief of Naval Operations, although resolving none of the issues in contention, marked the end of this painful period in the evolution of the United States Armed Forces.

The findings of the two Congressional committees which dealt with the "Admirals' Revolt" continue to frame the debate concerning the CNO's removal. The House concluded that Denfeld's dismissal was clearly a reprisal for testimony not welcomed by the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy. The Senate accepted the latter's view that there was no reprisal, only an accumulation of many minor incidents which led

to an impossible working relationship in the Navy's headquarters. None of the existing historical works have settled this conflict.

Many historians have examined the "revolt" and commented on its consequences, yet none have focused on the culminating episode in the struggle, the firing of Admiral Denfeld. Moreover, scholars have not yet tried to settle the ongoing controversy about what motivated this firing. This thesis will attempt to address these unanswered questions and demonstrate that the Secretary of the Navy had, for various reasons, contemplated removing the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) before Denfeld delivered his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. Although this testimony was not the only cause of Denfeld's removal, it persuaded Secretary Matthews to decide to accelerate the implementation of the plan he had already been developing to replace the CNO.

The opinions expressed in this thesis are based primarily on evidence obtained from the archives of the U. S. Navy, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Strategic Air Command and from the papers of President Truman, Secretaries of the Navy Sullivan and Matthews, Secretary of the Air Force Symington, and Admiral Denfeld. The resultant clarification of Secretary Matthews' motivations, while not a final and definitive answer, should go far to settle the controversy surrounding the firing of Admiral Denfeld.

Historians have written many analyses of the conflicts accompanying the Truman administration's efforts to consolidate the armed services under one Department of Defense. In doing so, they have consistently denigrated Admiral Denfeld and described him as having been everything from "the consummate bureaucrat" to an "oleaginous timeserver."⁴ Some of his naval colleagues have attempted to defend the CNO but have

⁴Thomas D. Boettcher, First Call: The Making of the Modern U. S. Military, 1945 - 1953, (Boston: Little Brown and Company), p. 139, and Arthur T. Hadley, The Straw Giant: Triumph and Failure - America's Armed Forces, (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 96.

had little success in reversing this historical judgment.⁵ The only depiction of Admiral Denfeld in the Truman Library's museum is a blown up political cartoon that unflatteringly casts Denfeld as a reluctant bride for Air Force General Spaatz in a military version of a shotgun wedding. Historians have caricatured Admiral Louis Denfeld predominantly as "Uncle Louie," and trivialized him as an insignificant figure in an era of giants.

Discussions of the "Revolt of the Admirals" as early as 1950 concluded that Denfeld was to blame for the lack of discipline and control in the Navy. These studies denounced him as a "weak leader" and "a commander who was incapable of controlling his subordinates."⁶ Much scholarship in subsequent decades totally neglected him, and where he is mentioned, his role is frequently misrepresented. Norman Polmar's biography of Admiral Rickover incorrectly describes Denfeld as "a naval aviator and former carrier commander."⁷ Mark Perry's study of four star officers and Lawrence Korb's analysis of the Secretary of Defense's relationship with the JCS both attribute Denfeld's removal to some sort of internal mutiny where the Navy's aviation community somehow forced the CNO from his position.⁸ Navy Secretary Francis P. Matthews has suffered the same sort of historical neglect. His only claim to fame is his role as a "rowboat Secretary" who

⁵Admiral Arleigh Burke wrote that he had "a great regard for Admiral Denfeld" and that "a lot of other people would have been worse." (Interview with Arleigh A. Burke, Admiral, USN (Ret.), "A Study of OP-23 and its Role in the Unification Debates of 1949," Volumes III and IV, by John T. Mason, 1980 - 81, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1983, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections, p. 533). Admiral Radford stated that "only the fact that with Admiral Denfeld as its military head, the Navy was united made it possible to keep going." (Stephen Jurika, Jr., ed., From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford, (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), p. 109).

⁶Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, The Truman MERRY-GO-ROUND, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), p. 455.

⁷Norman Polmar and Thomas B. Allen, Rickover, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 251.

⁸Mark. Perry, Four Stars, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), p. 19, and Lawrence J. Korb, "The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Conflict in the Budgetary Process, 1947 - 1971," Naval War College Review, December 1971, p. 26.

briefly took on the Navy's brass in the revolt. Both men's characters and imprint on history have been overlooked.

The best scholarly treatments of the period, Paul Hammond's "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," and Jeffrey Barlow's The Revolt of the Admirals, portray the CNO as a well-meaning but ineffective leader who found himself in an impossible position.

Hammond describes Denfeld's firing as "a true administrative tragedy, for the seeds of his destruction were inherent in the office which he held."⁹ Barlow concludes that the CNO's testimony "sealed his fate," but shares Hammond's appreciation of the difficulty of his position.¹⁰ Professor Isenberg's 1993 history of the modern U. S. Navy describes Denfeld as being a "man of high moral principles" who "lacked something as an inspiring leader."¹¹ Isenberg goes on to claim that Fleet Admirals King and Nimitz "were, by any measure, head and shoulders over Louis Denfeld."¹² Only Barlow has extensively studied Denfeld's papers, but his monograph does not concentrate on the CNO. There has been no scholarly effort to understand or assess Admiral Denfeld as a naval officer or evaluate the causes and consequences of his removal. Secretary Matthews is similarly overdue for a thorough reexamination.

In order to understand the causes of Denfeld's firing, one must first understand the circumstances surrounding the "Revolt of the Admirals" and the personalities involved therein. After laying this groundwork, this thesis will describe and analyze the events leading up to the President's and the Secretary of the Navy's decision to remove Admiral Denfeld, a decision taken during a painful period of military consolidation and

⁹Paul Y. Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers: Appropriations, Strategy, and Politics," in American Civil-Military Decisions, pp. 465-576, edited by Harold Stein, (Birmingham, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1963), p. 246.

¹⁰Jeffrey G. Barlow, The Revolt of the Admirals, (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1994), p. 269.

¹¹Michael T. Isenberg, Shield of the Republic: The United States Navy in an Era of Cold War and Violent Peace, Vol. I, 1945 - 1962, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 145.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 165.

reorientation. This thesis will conclude by seeking to demonstrate that the "revolt" and Denfeld's firing offer many lessons on civil-military relations, naval leadership, defense unification, and interactions between the Congress and the Executive Branch. These lessons should be particularly relevant to today's national policy-makers and military professionals who are engaged in a very similar process of military "downsizing" and strategic reevaluation accompanied by its own embarrassments and confrontations.

DEFENSE UNIFICATION TO 1947

"Proof that a divine Providence watches over the United States is furnished by the fact that we have managed to escape disaster even though our scrambled professional military setup has been an open invitation for catastrophe." (1944 magazine article by then-Senator Harry S. Truman)¹³

"All the services, but the Navy and Air Force in particular, descended rapidly - far too rapidly - into a gutter world characterized by spying, character assassination, and half truths. In the process *the* true goal of unification, the strengthening of national defense, got lost." (1993 historical perspective)¹⁴

From 1798 to 1947, the responsibility for the defense of the United States had been divided between the Departments of War (Army) and the Navy. The differences in their missions, clearly based on the geographical division between land and sea, had enabled the Army and Navy to prosecute the Country's wars successfully as independent fighting forces. Rarely did their operations overlap until the growing mobility and complexity of twentieth century warfare forced them into close contact and eventual confrontation.¹⁵ The introduction of the airplane into military operations opened a new arena for combat, one which overlapped both the land and sea and led to an acrimonious inter-service struggle for control of military aircraft. The Billy Mitchell affair of the 1920s

¹³Senator Harry S. Truman, "Our Armed Forces MUST Be Unified," Collier's, 26 August 1944, p. 16.

¹⁴Isenberg, p. 115.

¹⁵Many historians have discovered the genesis of a formal, joint military system in the Spanish-American War. Inter-service disagreements during this war convinced the services to create the Joint Army and Navy Board in 1903. (U.S., Congress, Senate, Defense Organization: The Need for Change, Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services, S. Rept. 99-86, 99th Cong., 1st sess., 1985, p. 276.) A recent Defense Department publication, "Joint Warfare of the US Armed Forces," also known as "Joint Pub 1," (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1991) attempts to show that joint operations have been crucial to American military efforts since the Revolutionary War. It uses the 1781 Battle of Yorktown and the Mississippi River campaign of the Civil War as historical examples of joint operations. These examples were actually the exception rather than the rule. The normal character of warfare prior to World War II was service-pure rather than joint.

is the most well-known episode in this conflict. Both services eventually regarded aviation as necessary to the success of operations on land and at sea, yet neither service trusted the other to provide the necessary air support. The expanding importance of amphibious operations and of the logistics involved in supporting complex military and naval forces also contributed to a blurring of what had been a clear division of responsibilities between the Army and the Navy. By the outbreak of World War II it had become obvious to even the most stubborn military traditionalists that the services needed to work together, but this cooperation proved exceptionally difficult to achieve in practice.

Before World War Two, the United States Congress also perceived the trend toward service unification and studied both the influence of aviation on military organization and the prospect for unifying the two services under one Department of Defense. Representative Carl Vinson, who would play a key role in the 1949 "revolt," had served on the Morrow Board in 1925 which examined these issues in the wake of General Mitchell's court martial.¹⁶ Although this Board had rejected arguments for a separate Air Force and a unified Defense Department, the proponents of these ideas did not give up. The "economy bill" of 1932 originally contained a provision to unify the American military, but this section was deleted on the floor of the House.¹⁷ In the 1930s, advocates of unifying the small defense establishment primarily touted unification as an economy measure. Although Congress did not then pass any reorganization bills, it demonstrated its willingness to consider new ideas on defense organization.

World War II forced the services into close cooperation in all theaters of that global conflict. Naval forces served under General Eisenhower's command during the Normandy landings, and Army troops followed the orders of Marine generals in the island-

¹⁶Captain John F. Tarpey, USN, "Uncle Carl," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1982, p. 38.

¹⁷Lawrence J. Korb, "Service Unification: Arena of Fears, Hopes, and Ironies," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, May 1978, p. 172.

hopping campaigns of the Pacific. The Pacific region was divided up into two regional joint commands under Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur to facilitate each exercising unified command over multi-service operations in their respective regions. President Roosevelt created the Joint Chiefs of Staff to parallel a British structure and gave this body the responsibility to coordinate the operations of the services throughout the globe.¹⁸ Despite these organizational shifts, competition and rivalry between the services continued. Veterans of World War II saw a clear need for improving cooperation between the services after 1945. Public pressure encouraging closer inter-service coordination and even unification was such that in 1950, Rear Admiral Gallery observed "through some magic process since the end of World War II, this word 'unification' has become a fetish; anything with that label attached to it is assured to be sacred. Nobody knows exactly what it means, but everybody is for it."¹⁹

Harry Truman, who as President became the chief standard bearer for this concept, had served during the war as the head of Congress' "Truman Committee" charged with inspecting and evaluating the homefront defense production, procurement, and distribution systems. In the course of this two-year review, Truman found so many examples of counterproductive rivalry between the services that he became "a staunch unificationist."²⁰ In late 1944, after being chosen as President Roosevelt's running mate on the strength of his work in the Senate, Truman published an article in Collier's entitled "Our Armed

¹⁸The Historical Division of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has produced an excellent overview of the development of joint operations and joint organizational structures titled "History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946 - 1977." Although it is unpublished, it can be obtained from the Joint Staff's History Office in the Pentagon. Other good studies of this topic include Paul Y. Hammond's Organizing for Defense, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), Paolo E. Coletta's The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953, (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), and the introduction to the 1985 Senate Report 99-86, Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services, Defense Organization: The Need for Change, 99th Cong., 1st sess.

¹⁹Daniel V. Gallery, Rear Admiral, USN, "If This Be Treason -," Collier's, 21 January 1950, p. 15.

²⁰Tarpey, p. 40.

Forces MUST be Unified." He believed current relations between the services to be marked by "prejudices and jealous rivalries that masquerade as *esprit de corps*," and noted the "stiff-necked contentiousness" of the uniformed leaders. He complained of "the operational gulf which yawns between the services" and advocated the disestablishment of Annapolis and West Point as "competitive institutions." His overall solution was "the integration of America's defense in one department under one authoritative, responsible head."²¹ As one might expect given Truman's experience as an Army Captain during World War I, most of his examples of poor inter-service cooperation faulted the Navy rather than the Army.

When Truman became President upon Roosevelt's death in April 1945, he continued to advocate service unification. Shortly after he took over, an observer in the Oval Office noted that "Roosevelt's naval scenes had been replaced with a series of prints of early airplanes."²² Although Truman's subordinates were hardly unanimous in viewing him as an Air Force partisan, the new President was clearly less sympathetic to the sea services than had been his predecessor who had served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy and retained a great fondness for nautical things. Secretary of the Navy Sullivan went as far as to state that "it wasn't the United States Navy, it was Roosevelt's Navy, and he protected them all through the years . . . [causing] the natural instincts of self-preservation in the Navy to atrophy."²³

Naval personnel, knowing of Truman's Army service and his 1938 Senate advocacy for an air force "second to none," agreed with Admiral Radford, who saw Truman as "a hard-line Army man."²⁴ The Navy's civilian leaders were more charitable.

²¹Truman, pp. 16 and 63-64.

²²David G. McCullough, *Truman*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 402.

²³Interview with John L. Sullivan by Jerry N. Ness, 27 March 1972 and 13 April 1972, Washington, D.C., Transcript, 1973, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 31.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 234, and Jurika, p. 83.

Secretary Forrestal, who led the Navy from 1944 to 1947 before becoming the first Secretary of Defense, recorded in his diary in mid-1946 that "the President is not taking sides either for or against the Army or the Navy" and later noted that Truman "said he was not prejudiced in favor of one service or the other - what he wanted was a balanced system of national defense."²⁵ Forrestal's successor as Navy Secretary, John L. Sullivan, agreed with this assessment. When asked in an interview if he believed Truman's Army service caused him to be partial to the Army, Sullivan stated, "No, I think he was very fair."²⁶ Regardless of his prejudices, Harry S. Truman was now Commander in Chief of all the services, and the Navy was forced to redevelop its capacity for self-preservation in the ensuing debates over the implementation of President Truman's unification plans.

The military requirements and strategic landscape of 1946 differed markedly from those of the pre-war period. Whereas a typical 1930s combined Army and Navy budget amounted to less than \$1 billion, post-war funding for the defense establishment never dropped below \$11 billion.²⁷ Nuclear weapons and long-range aircraft had seemingly rendered much of military doctrine and weaponry obsolete and had made the Nation vulnerable to a devastating enemy attack. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans no longer served as shields to keep aggressors at arm's length. Professors Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski have noted that "amid the casualties of World War II lay the corpse of traditional American defense policy."²⁸ Vast budgetary growth, changes in the nature of warfare, and lessons learned from that war prompted renewed calls in the press and in Congress for unification of the armed services to improve efficiency and economy in national defense. Only the Navy seemed to oppose these proposed changes.

²⁵Walter Millis, ed., The Forrestal Diaries, (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 152, 160.

²⁶Sullivan interview, p. 32.

²⁷Korb, "Service Unification," p. 172.

²⁸Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America, (New York: The Free Press, 1984), p. 471.

The Navy, under the leadership of its wartime CNO, Fleet Admiral Ernest King, began, in 1945, to develop plans for its post-war forces. Its first plan called for a peacetime force based around 14 battleships and 14 carriers, and reflected more the Navy's traditional view of what it was rather than what it should be in light of lessons learned in World War II regarding its probable future obligations. Admiral Radford was one of the few naval leaders who vigorously opposed this unrealistic plan.²⁹ In November 1945, he stated that "things were really in a mess. The Department as a whole and, worse, the Navy at large had no guidance."³⁰ The only thing most naval leaders could agree on was their opposition to unification, recognizing that their Army and Air Force counterparts were generally unfamiliar with naval warfare and would be able to outvote them on issues critical to the future of the naval services.

At the same time, the Army Air Corps, under the leadership of Generals Arnold and Spaatz, was aggressively endorsing the creation of a separate Air Force and had a good plan and strategy to back up their ideas. They contended that their capability to drop atomic weapons from long-range bombers would effectively deter any potential enemy from attacking the United States, and, if this deterrent was ignored, the bombers could quickly devastate an enemy's homeland just as they had done to Germany and Japan in 1945. As commanders of this primary American striking force, the air generals felt justified in cutting all organizational ties to the ground army. The concept of a long-range "atomic blitz" and an independent Air Force was not new. In the early 1920s the Italian aviation prophet Giulio Douhet asserted in his Command of the Air the omnipotence of strategic bombing. General Billy Mitchell and other U. S. Army Air Service officers had quickly adopted Douhet's ideas and adapted them to American strategies. Finally, in 1945,

²⁹Jurika, pp. 78-79.

³⁰Ibid., p. 81.

atomic weaponry gave them the means to wield the strategic force Douhet had envisioned. The only obstacle to attaining their objectives was the need to convince either Congress or the Army and the Navy that the creation of an independent Air Force dedicated to strategic bombing was in the nation's best interests. For obvious reasons, they believed Congress and the public to be most susceptible to persuasion, and began a vigorous campaign for military reform.

The Air Corps generals did not miss any opportunities to try to influence their sister services as well. In November 1945, General Spaatz offered Admiral Radford, one of the Navy's ranking aviators, the chance to succeed Spaatz as the head of a combined Air Force if Radford would support giving it command over Navy as well as Army aircraft. Radford respectfully declined to accept this offer even though he considered it to be "an alluring prospect" and "felt highly complimented."³¹ The armed services could reach no agreement on any overall military strategy. And with President Truman's tight limits on the military budget, all three services were cut to the bone. The inter-service competition to develop an effective and politically acceptable strategic concept and protect each service's place in the national defense establishment rapidly degenerated into a public relations war which Carl Borklund characterized as "one of the shoddiest spitting contests in U. S. military history."³²

President Truman introduced his first defense reorganization proposal in late 1945, but opposition from military leaders and their Congressional supporters prevented approval of any bill until 1947. The President's initial proposal followed the lines of his 1944 Collier's article by placing the services under a strong Secretary and a single military Chief of Staff. This structure resembled the German General Staff, a pattern that

³¹Jurika, p. 82.

³²Carl W. Borklund, Men of the Pentagon, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 45.

Truman's opponents frequently charged was incompatible with a democratic form of government. The Army fully supported this strongly centralized organization, but the Navy vehemently opposed any efforts to establish a single commander of the Armed Forces other than the President. The admirals and their Secretary, James Forrestal, feared that they would be subordinate to the ground and air services and publicly raised the specter of a military "man on horseback" usurping the President's constitutional powers and imposing military controls over the Nation.³³ Secretary Forrestal also repeatedly pointed out that no man would be able to control the vast defense establishment and retain his sanity - an opinion he would tragically and ironically validate several years later.

Forrestal expended great effort studying the various unification proposals and even commissioned an independent effort under Ferdinand Eberstadt to develop a defense organization that would protect the Navy's interests while providing the economy and coordination the President and the public sought. This 250-page report, completed in September 1945, eventually served as the basis for the National Security Act of 1947.³⁴ The Army and its air component opposed Eberstadt's weaker structure, and the inter-service arguments concerning the structure of a unified defense establishment continued for two years. The leading naval officers in this debate, representing the new CNO, Fleet Admiral Nimitz, were Vice Admiral Arthur Radford, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (DCNO) for Air, and Vice Admiral Forrest Sherman, DCNO for Operations. Both were naval aviators and played distinct roles, Radford taking the hard line and Sherman acting as the contemplative intellectual. Both men acted in similar fashion in the 1949 "revolt." As Forrestal's views began to gain the upper hand in the protracted negotiations, the

³³Navy Secretary Forrestal was even urged by Vice Admiral Radford to resign in protest due to Truman's adoption of the Army's plan. Forrestal chose to stay and fight, eventually successfully, in order not to "let the Navy down." See Jurika, p. 93.

³⁴Walter Millis, ed., The Forrestal Diaries, (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 64.

President's exasperation with his military leaders was obvious. In 1946, he stated that "naval officers were engaged in propagandizing and lobbying" and that "the Air Force had no discipline."³⁵

The publicity machines of the two camps continued to present their cases to the public. Neither camp favored restraint. A 1946 speech by Army Air Corps General Frank Armstrong, Jr. at a "goodwill dinner" arranged by businessmen in Norfolk, Virginia, the home port of the Atlantic Fleet, is a good example of the emotion and arrogance displayed by both sides:

You gentlemen had better understand that the Army Air Force is tired of being a subordinate outfit. It was the predominant force during the war, and it is going to be a predominant force during the peace . . . and we do not care whether you like it or not. The Army Air Force is going to run the show. You, the Navy, are not going to have anything but a couple of carriers which are ineffective anyway, and they will probably be sunk in the first battle. Now, as for the Marines, you know what the Marines are, a small bitched-up army talking Navy lingo. We are going to put those Marines in the Regular Army and make efficient soldiers out of them.³⁶

Given this type of ammunition, it is no wonder the military leadership seemed to explode at the mere mention of unification.

Despite of - or maybe because of - his frustration with this squabbling, President Truman remained convinced that greater central direction of the services was required and forwarded a compromise unification bill to Congress.³⁷ He signed the resulting National Security Act of 1947 into law on 22 July. Richard Haynes has speculated that the

³⁵Richard F. Haynes, The Awesome Power: Harry S. Truman as Commander in Chief, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 100, and Millis, p. 149.

³⁶General Armstrong's speech is quoted in Demitrios Caraley, The Politics of Military Unification, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 151. In a later article, General Spaatz even asked "Why Should We Have a Navy at All?" See Caraley, p. 100.

³⁷McCullough, p. 476.

President may have "deliberately allowed the services to pick at each other in public . . . to strengthen [his] case for unification."³⁸

Whatever the cause, the true losers in this struggle were the Nation and the armed services in general and James Forrestal in particular. The Armed Forces spent two years wrangling over organizational structures and thereby drifted and fragmented, costing the Nation dearly. A 1 May 1946 telephone conversation between Navy Under Secretary Sullivan and Under Secretary of War for Air Stuart Symington clearly demonstrates that this cost was obvious even to the partisans on each side:

Symington: I think that if we're going to continue to argue as to who did this and who did that we're going to get ourselves in a hell of a mess, instead of cleaning it up. I think the only people who are really suffering by this argument is the country, the people, not the services.

Sullivan: That's right . . .³⁹

So uncontrollable did the services appear to be that Admiral Radford concluded that "ranking unification high in the list of problems that our leaders had to study and attempt to solve in those immediate post-war days was one of the gravest mistakes ever made by a president."⁴⁰ But, taking a longer view in retrospect, the President's memoirs contend that military unification was one of the "outstanding achievements" of the Truman administration.⁴¹

The National Military Establishment (NME) set up by the new legislation has been described as "a loosely knit grouping of executive departments" and a "confederation

³⁸Haynes, p. 97.

³⁹Transcript of telephone conversation between John L. Sullivan and W. Stuart Symington, 1 May 1946, Sullivan Papers, Box 7, File "Air Force," Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

⁴⁰Jurika, p. 85.

⁴¹Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, Vol. II, Years of Trial and Hope, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956), p. 53. The best analysis of President Truman's role as a military reformer can be found in Haynes, pp. 93-115.

rather than a unified or even a federal structure."⁴² This essay will not attempt to describe its organization in detail, but suffice it to say that unification had not found its final form under this legislation.⁴³ An organizational chart of the NME is attached at Appendix I. Secretary Forrestal was given the responsibility of coordinating all services' budgets, strategies, and operations but was given little authority to enforce his decisions. Michael Isenberg has written that

no one in Forrestal's modest suite of offices facing the Mall (he had only sixty people at first) dared use the resulting acronym - NME - although ENEMY was as good as any other single word to describe the bitterness and hostility generated by unification.⁴⁴

Precious little was accomplished under this structure other than intensifying inter-service arguments.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were officially chartered under this act but received no direction on how they were to resolve disputes between the services. In fact, rather than becoming a unifying authority to settle issues, this body continued to serve as a forum for inter-service wrangling. The chiefs who filled the JCS positions when the National Security Act was approved were General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Army Chief of Staff, Admiral Nimitz as CNO, and General Carl Spaatz, as Air Force Chief of Staff, all distinguished World War II field commanders. These leaders were relieved by Army General Omar N. Bradley, Air Force General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, and Admiral Denfeld between December 1947 and April 1948.⁴⁵ The new group was obliged to hit the ground

⁴²William Frye, "The National Military Establishment," The American Political Science Review, June 1949, p. 545, and Korb, "Service Unification," p. 175.

⁴³Pages 543-555 of Frye's article provides an excellent discussion of the new organization's structure.

⁴⁴Isenberg, p. 114.

⁴⁵Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense Key Officials, 1947 - 1992, unpublished compilation, 1992. A good summary of JCS organization and procedures can be found in Arthur A. Ageton, Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.), "The Joint Chiefs of Staff," Shipmate, July 1951, p. 3ff.

running because budget struggles and disagreements about unification's ultimate form had not gone away.

Economy had always been touted as one chief benefit of unification. Defense Secretary Forrestal struggled to achieve consolidation of the military budgets and elimination of duplication, but was unable to persuade his uniformed leaders to place national interests above their parochial service concerns. Instead, this consolidation of budgets actually served as "an exhilarating stimulant of inter-service rivalries."⁴⁶ Outside the privacy of their own meetings, Truman restricted the Chiefs to mere advocacy of the administration's "party line" regarding defense budgets and strategy. Richard Betts concluded that the Truman administration "positively politicized" the Chiefs, making them administration spokesmen rather than military advisors. This policy contradicted the intent of unification to make them "non-partisan professionals."⁴⁷ Inside the Pentagon, these professionals continued to expend much energy fighting one another. Into this lion's den in late 1947 went Admiral Louis E. Denfeld as the new CNO and successor to the retired Fleet Admiral Nimitz.

⁴⁶Harold Stein, ed., American Civil-Military Decisions, (Birmingham, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1963), p. 7.

⁴⁷Richard K. Betts, Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 53.

ADMIRAL DENFELD TAKES THE HELM

"He is liked by everyone." (1912 - Midshipman Denfeld's Naval Academy graduation yearbook entry)⁴⁸

President Truman "asked me who I wanted for the Navy as CNO and I told him the choices remained the same: Ramsey, Blandy, and Denfeld; that I was somewhat concerned about Denfeld's political activity. . . . However, it is obvious that the President would find Denfeld the easiest of the lot to work with." (1947 - diary entry by Secretary of Defense James Forrestal)⁴⁹

Louis Emil Denfeld was born on 13 April 1891, in Westboro, Massachusetts. His parents, Professor Robert E. Denfeld and Etta May Denfeld, were the first generation of each of their families to be born in the United States. Robert's father had emigrated from Germany in 1848.⁵⁰ The Denfeld family had already produced one U. S. naval officer by the time of Louis' birth. George William Denfeld, Louis' uncle, had graduated from the Naval Academy in the class of 1877 and risen to the rank of Captain before retiring in 1905.⁵¹ Current Biography, 1947 claimed that Louis was inspired by his uncle to seek an appointment to the Naval Academy.⁵² After Louis' graduation from the Academy in 1912, his cousins, Fred and Richard, both followed in his footsteps, graduating in the classes of 1922 and 1952 respectively.⁵³ Fred reached the rank of Commander, but Richard broke

⁴⁸Lucky Bag, U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1912, (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Academy, 1912), p. 102. The Lucky Bag is the Naval Academy's yearbook. Each member of the graduating class is allocated one page which contains his picture and a semi-biographical note, usually written by one of his classmates.

⁴⁹Millis, p. 325.

⁵⁰Letter from Admiral Louis Denfeld to Karl Denfeld of Kassel, Germany, 23 September 1949, Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Denfeld," Naval Historical Center Archives, Washington, D. C., and Naval Office of Information, Biographical Sketch, Admiral Louis Emil Denfeld, U.S. Navy, Retired, 20 December 1967.

⁵¹United States Naval Academy Alumni Association, Register of Alumni, (Annapolis, Maryland: U. S. Naval Academy Alumni Association, Inc., 1987), p. 143.

⁵²Anna Rothe, ed., Current Biography, 1947, (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1948), p. 160.

⁵³U. S. Naval Academy, Register of Alumni, pp. 184 and 295, Letter from Admiral Louis Denfeld to Congressman Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota, 10 November 1948, Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Denfeld,"

with the family's Navy tradition by transferring to the Air Force upon graduation and rising to the rank of Colonel before retirement.⁵⁴

Louis was a remarkable midshipman only in his lack of noteworthy achievement. He stood 88th in a class of 156, and his graduation entry in the Lucky Bag notes his pleasant disposition but makes no mention of his having attained any leadership positions in the Midshipman regiment or in any team sports.⁵⁵ His roommate, Ralph Parr, held a "three-striper" leadership position while lettering in basketball and distinguishing himself as a rifleman. Other classmates who later achieved public recognition included Richard E. Byrd, the famous polar explorer, and DeWitt Clinton Ramsey, one of Denfeld's competitors for the CNO position in 1947. The Lucky Bag described Louis Denfeld as "a rough-house kid with a happy-go-lucky disposition, . . . [and] often one of the boys."⁵⁶ To accompany his personal entry and picture, Louis chose an intriguing quotation, given his future fame as the half-hearted leader of rebellious admirals: "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."⁵⁷ As CNO, Admiral Denfeld was often criticized for ignoring or delegating difficult problems rather than taking them on himself.

After graduation, Denfeld was commissioned an Ensign and served in succession on battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. In 1915, he married Rachel Metcalf and returned to sea duty, eventually rising to command the destroyer U.S.S. McCall at the end of World War I. In 1922, he completed submarine training and served during 1923 and 1924 in the submarine force where he earned the submariners' gold dolphins and commanded the submarine S-24. Afterward, Denfeld began to serve in staff billets, beginning with two

Naval Historical Center Archives, Washington, D. C., Telegram from Admiral Louis Denfeld to Admiral Roper, 23 April 1948, Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Denfeld," Naval Historical Center Archives, Washington, D. C., and interview with Richard Denfeld, telephone, 14 February 1995.

⁵⁴U. S. Naval Academy, Register of Alumni, p. 295.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 163, and Lucky Bag, p. 102.

⁵⁶Lucky Bag, p. 102.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

years in the Office of the CNO followed by a brief destroyer command. Thereafter, Admiral Richard Leigh, Commander of the Atlantic Fleet's Battleship Division, selected Commander Denfeld to be his aide, a position he retained as Admiral Leigh rose to command the United States Fleet in 1933. Following additional sea and shore assignments, in June 1937, Denfeld was chosen to be the aide of the CNO who became his chief patron, Admiral William Leahy.⁵⁸

During World War II, Captain Denfeld served as the Chief of Staff for the Commander of the Navy's Atlantic Support Force, coordinating the escorts for North Atlantic convoys bound for Great Britain. He then moved to the Navy's Bureau of Personnel as Assistant Chief and supervised the manning of the wartime Navy from early 1942 through March 1945. Admiral King finally awarded Rear Admiral Denfeld a sea command toward the end of the Pacific war, assigning him to lead Battleship Division Nine under Admiral Halsey in support of the Okinawa landings and naval operations against the Japanese home islands. Immediately after the Japanese surrender Denfeld was ordered to Washington to head the Bureau of Personnel and coordinate the Navy's demobilization. Denfeld ably managed the Navy's manpower pool from August 1945 through February 1947 under the new CNO, Admiral Nimitz. Through his routine opportunities to testify before Congress on personnel issues, he made important contacts which would facilitate his later becoming an effective advocate of the Navy's interests as CNO.⁵⁹ Admiral Nimitz rewarded Denfeld in February 1947 by awarding him a fourth

⁵⁸Naval Office of Information, Biographical Sketch, Admiral Louis Emil Denfeld, U.S. Navy, Retired, 20 December 1967 and Robert W. Love, Jr., ed., The Chiefs of Naval Operations, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980), p. 193.

⁵⁹See Sullivan Papers, Box 7, File "Denfeld," and Secretary of the Navy appointment calendar, Truman Library, Independence, Missouri for examples of contacts with Congressional and Executive Branch leaders.

star and making him Commander in Chief of the Navy's Pacific Fleet and of the joint Pacific Command, Admiral Nimitz's wartime position.⁶⁰

Although Admiral Denfeld had now escaped from the tense Washington atmosphere and could enjoy the warm Hawaii sun, his name remained on the lips of the NME's leaders. Secretary Forrestal wrote him a friendly, conversational letter in May 1947 giving his ex-personnel chief an update on the current budget negotiations.⁶¹ Speculation had also already begun regarding Admiral Nimitz's successor as CNO, since his 2-year term was due to expire in December. Nimitz provided his recommendations to his civilian superiors at the end of the summer. He favored Admirals W. H. P. Blandy, DeWitt C. Ramsey, Richard L. Connoly, Charles M. Cooke, and Louis E. Denfeld as suitable candidates to fill his position.⁶² Blandy, Connoly, and Cooke were surface ship officers in the standard naval tradition, and all had impressive combat service records. Ramsey, an academy classmate of Denfeld's, had made his mark in the Navy as an aviator and had commanded an aircraft carrier with great success against the Japanese. Admiral Denfeld was the only candidate with extensive Washington experience, and his patron, Admiral Leahy, still exercised great influence in the Nation's capital.

As Secretary Forrestal narrowed his choices, he received recommendations for Cooke from retired Fleet Admiral King and for Denfeld from Leahy. Nimitz gave no preference. By early October, the Secretary had narrowed his choices to Denfeld, Ramsey, or Blandy and discussed his difficult decision with the President. Professor Isenberg has concluded that Leahy's recommendation helped determine the President's choice of a new CNO because Leahy had served as Truman's Chief of Staff and was

⁶⁰Ibid., and Rothe, Current Biography, 1947, pp. 161-62.

⁶¹Millis, p. 275.

⁶²Love, The Chiefs of Naval Operations, p. 193.

"practically the only naval officer the President trusted."⁶³ Forrestal suggested that Denfeld would be "the easiest of the lot to work with," and this seemed to Truman to be the deciding argument.⁶⁴ Given the fact that no candidate appeared markedly superior to the others, the President was hesitant to give his new CNO a full four-year term, the maximum authorized under the regulations. Nimitz had served for only two years, a fact that the Admiral "regretted and rather resented,"⁶⁵ and the President saw no reason to grant a longer commission to his successor. It has been asserted that Denfeld's two year term in some way reflected of the President's lack of confidence in him, but this can not be demonstrated with any credibility.⁶⁶ The President made his choice on 12 November 1947, and the very next day, Admiral Denfeld began work in Washington by meeting with Secretary Forrestal and senior naval aviators on "Project A," the Navy's code name for the newly designed flush-deck aircraft carrier, later popularized as the "supercarrier" and destined to play an important part in the unfolding saga of unification.⁶⁷ On 15 December 1947, Admiral Denfeld officially relieved Nimitz.

The new CNO was very familiar with the Navy's organization, having spent five of the last eight years in Washington. His official primary duty was "to command the operating forces and be responsible to the Secretary of the Navy for their use." He was also to serve as the "principal naval advisor to the President and to the Secretary of the Navy on the conduct of war, . . . [and to be] the Navy member of the Joint Chiefs of

⁶³Isenberg, p. 145, and Henry H. Adams, Witness to Power: The Life of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute Press, 1985), p. 328.

⁶⁴Millis, p. 325.

⁶⁵Potter, Nimitz, p. 428.

⁶⁶Isenberg, p. 145.

⁶⁷Sullivan Papers, Box 8, Secretary of the Navy appointment calendar, Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

Staff."⁶⁸ Because the Navy Department also included the Marine Corps, Denfeld became the advocate for the Marines in the JCS. The Commandant of the Marine Corps did not become a full-fledged JCS member until the Eisenhower administration.

Denfeld was authorized to assign a Vice Chief of Naval Operations (VCNO) and no more than six Deputy Chiefs of Naval Operations (DCNOs) to assist him in meeting his responsibilities. The structure Denfeld inherited included five DCNOs: "OP01" took charge of personnel matters, "OP02" dealt with administration, "OP03" was responsible for operations, "OP04" oversaw the Navy's logistics, and "OP05" ran the Navy's aviation programs.⁶⁹ A Navy Department organizational chart is attached in Appendix I. Shortly after assuming his new duties, Denfeld brought in Vice Admiral Radford as his VCNO and right hand man, and would rely heavily on Radford's extensive background in naval aviation and unification issues.

As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Denfeld took on several additional responsibilities. The Chiefs served as "the principal military advisors to the President and the Secretary of Defense," and carried out the following specific duties:

- to prepare strategic plans and to provide for the strategic direction of the military forces;
- to prepare joint logistic plans . . . ;
- to establish unified [joint] commands in strategic areas . . . ;
- to formulate policies for the joint training of the military forces;
- to formulate policies for coordinating the education of members of the military forces;
- to review major military material and personnel requirements . . . in accordance with strategic and logistic plans; and

⁶⁸U.S. Department of the Navy, Office of the Management Engineer, The United States Navy: A Description of its Functional Organization, unpublished manual, 1948, p. 57, contained in the Papers of Francis P. Matthews, File "Navy," Truman Library, Independence Missouri.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 22, and Robert G. Albion and Robert H. Connery, Forrestal and the Navy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 239.

- to provide United States representation on the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations . . .⁷⁰

The service chiefs were individually assigned to supervise appropriate joint theater commands, and, given the Navy's interests, Admiral Denfeld assumed the responsibility for the Pacific Command (his previous assignment) and the Atlantic Command, then under Admiral Blandy's leadership. Later, Denfeld, as the Navy's senior officer, also became responsible for the naval support command for Europe, designated as the Northeastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Command under Admiral Connoly.

Denfeld took these responsibilities seriously and sought to help the Joint Chiefs provide the best possible national defense, but he was certainly aware of the on-going inter-service struggles. Shortly after taking over the Pacific Command, he had observed that "the Army and the Air Force seek to shackle, restrict, or otherwise prevent the Navy from exploiting its intrinsic capabilities."⁷¹ He later reflected that "the task [of the JCS] would be, I thought, to fit the best tools each service could provide to the joint problem of winning any war by swift, efficiently co-ordinated teamwork."⁷² But, as he was soon to find out, service politics and struggles for budgetary allocations often overrode these larger concerns. The Hoover Commission studied the functioning of the JCS in mid-1948 and concluded that the Chiefs were influenced too much by considerations of "service particularism and aggrandizement" and failed to devote adequate "time and thought" to their broader duties.⁷³ Despite Admiral Denfeld's original intentions, he soon discovered

⁷⁰U.S. Department of the Navy, The United States Navy, p. 50. These duties are reprinted from the text of the National Security Act of 1947.

⁷¹Admiral Denfeld's March 1947 statement, quoted in Steven L. Rearden, History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Volume I: The Formative Years, 1947-1950, (Washington: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1984), p. 395.

⁷²Louis E. Denfeld, Admiral, USN (Ret.), "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 33.

⁷³Chairman, Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government, The National Security Organization, (The Hoover Commission Report) H. Doc. No. 86, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 1949, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, pp. 66-67.

that if he failed to look out for the Navy's interests, the other Chiefs would run roughshod over his service. He came to understand that he must fight for every dollar in the Navy's budget.

DENFELD BATTLES FOR THE NAVY (DECEMBER 1947 TO MARCH 1949)

"Denfeld was a very nice person. . . . He was a very decent person, but this [the JCS] wasn't his league." (1949 - Wilfred J. McNeil, Assistant Secretary of Defense)⁷⁴

"The admirals frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his only prophet, and the United States Navy the only true Church." (1947 - McGeorge Bundy, Presidential Adviser)⁷⁵

1947 and 1948 were two of the most turbulent peacetime years experienced by Americans in recent memory. At home the American people sought to return to a normal routine following the trauma of the Second World War, yet this led to inflation, strikes, and other problems. Finding productive work for returning servicemen was increasingly difficult as the wartime economy contracted, leading to serious unemployment problems and a dramatic rise in the Nation's homeless population. Pent up labor frustrations paralyzed many industries, eventually causing the President to break one strike with federal troops. Truman's concern for the health of the economy caused him to place very tight limits on all allocations, especially those for defense projects, in an attempt to minimize budget deficits.

The United States was unable to return to its traditional isolationist posture following the war. Its commitment to the new United Nations and its status as the only nuclear power required extensive international obligations. The Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and aid to the Chinese Nationalists demanded that vast sums be

⁷⁴Interview with Wilfred J. McNeil by Jerry N. Ness, 1972, Washington, D.C., Transcript, 1979, Truman Library, p. 113.

⁷⁵Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, On Active Service in Peace and War, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 506.

appropriated from the national treasury to promote political stability abroad and to protect democracy from the growing communist menace. Soon, the Berlin crisis, the creation of NATO, the victory of Mao's Chinese communists, and Soviet nuclear tests would harden the battle lines of the Cold War. National interest and the support of allies obliged the United States to remain engaged in this global struggle.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were responsible for formulating military contingency plans to meet all crises effecting the United States' interests throughout the world. Despite growing international dangers, domestic economic and social pressures severely constrained available military options. Postwar demobilization had left the United States with only the sixth largest Army in the world by mid-1947.⁷⁶ The American Armed Forces had dropped from their 1945 peak strength of 12 million to just over 1.5 million in 1947. Even President Truman characterized this process as "efficient disintegration."⁷⁷ The limited capabilities of the Nation's forces were, for obvious reasons, not well publicized; but at the time of the Czechoslovak communist coup in 1948, the Army could have only deployed one combat-ready division if the Soviets had threatened Western Europe. The Navy and the Air Force were in much the same sorry state. In early 1948, Secretary Forrestal reported to the President that an "acute personnel shortage . . . requires the immobilization of 107 ships."⁷⁸

Admiral Denfeld recognized the difficult demands his new position would impose, but believed that in concert with the able and experienced Secretary of the Navy, John L. Sullivan, he could adequately defend the naval services' interests in the inter-service power struggles and promote an effective strategy for national defense. He encouraged his subordinates to broaden their experience to include "skills in business organization and

⁷⁶Haynes, p. 119.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Millis, p. 375.

administration" because he realized that in peacetime, the greatest threat to the Navy was in the Nation's capital rather than on the high seas.⁷⁹ To keep in close contact with the other services and the Secretary of Defense, Admiral Denfeld led the January 1948 effort to move the Navy's headquarters to the Pentagon from its home in the Main Navy Building on Constitution Avenue. Initially, the public feedback he received on his performance was very positive. The Cleveland Plain Dealer described the Navy's leadership in June 1948 as "a fighting, winning team . . . [who] have been able to infuse Congress with some of their Navy enthusiasm."⁸⁰ But soon his management and leadership skills began to be questioned inside and outside the Navy.

The CNO's extensive background in personnel and budgetary matters enabled him to feel very comfortable testifying before Congress and arguing with the other service chiefs on these issues, but on other matters he routinely delegated the leadership role to one of his deputies. Vice Admiral Libby recalled that "Admiral Denfeld never had much to say when he was down at Joint Chiefs of Staff meetings. . . . He was very much interested in being Chief of Naval Operations, but he didn't enjoy being a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That was his great weakness."⁸¹ Vice Admiral Carney, Denfeld's DCNO for Logistics and later a CNO himself, echoed this view:

We [Radford, Sherman, and Carney] were doing all the work on the JCS. . . . Questions would come up on technical issues, where Raddy and I had lived through it and knew what the hell we were talking about . . . and Louie, he wouldn't know his ass from third base about it.⁸²

⁷⁹Admiral Denfeld's preface to Department of the Navy, The United States Navy, p. v.

⁸⁰Walker S. Buel, "It's a Great Week for the Navy," Cleveland Plain Dealer, 4 June 1948, in the Denfeld Papers, Naval Historical Center Archives, Box 6, File "Clippings."

⁸¹Interview with Ruthven E. Libby, Vice Admiral, USN (Ret.) by Commander Etta-Belle Kitchen, USN, 1984, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1984, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections, p. 168.

⁸²Vice Admiral Carney quoted in Isenberg, p. 145.

Denfeld's habit of routinely delegating many of his duties also frustrated the leaders of the other services. Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington recalled that even though Admiral Denfeld was CNO, "the real boss" appeared to be Radford.⁸³ General Eisenhower privately commented on the JCS' operations at that time:

The situation grows intolerable. Denfeld apparently wants to do right, but he practically retires from every discussion in favor of [Vice Admiral Arthur D.] Struble [DCNO for Operations], who infuriates everyone with his high, strident voice and apparent inability to see any viewpoint except his own.⁸⁴

Although Denfeld could be an eloquent speaker and was committed to defend the Navy's interests, he seemed to lack enthusiasm for fighting in the joint arena. His practice of obtaining the advice and aid of experts on technical questions was appropriate for a CNO, but he delegated so many tasks to his subordinates that he did not establish himself as the primary spokesman for the Navy. Professor Isenberg has concluded that Denfeld held "the leading reins very loosely - if he had quite grasped them at all."⁸⁵ Later, when circumstances and conscience pushed Admiral Denfeld into taking a public stand as the Navy's primary spokesman, he vacillated and procrastinated until his leadership had little influence on his subordinates and Congress. His inability to maintain control over his service and serve as its public leader eventually cost him his job.

Denfeld proved to be a successful CNO in other arenas. His Congressional contacts were well developed by the time he assumed this office. As one of the few Republicans in the Truman administration, he cultivated good relations with G. O. P. leaders. At the same time, he understood that every high-ranking military officer was obliged to avoid publicly making partisan political statements. He made "a very favorable

⁸³Interview with W. Stuart Symington by James R. Fuchs, 1981, Washington, D.C., Transcript, 1983, Truman Library, p. 78.

⁸⁴Eisenhower statement of 19 March 1949, quoted in Rearden, p. 366.

⁸⁵Isenberg, p. 146.

impression" on Senator Robert Taft of Ohio in December 1947. In discussions with Republican Party officials, he even explored whether or not to reserve a room for him at the 1948 Republican National Convention, but eventually declined to do so: "As you know, I would be delighted to be there . . . but I think I might be criticized in my position if I were."⁸⁶ During the summer of 1948, while President Truman campaigned for reelection in a contest few expected him to win, Denfeld admitted privately to having been approached "by a number of Republican leaders asking me who I wanted as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Navy."⁸⁷ No wonder Forrestal had been concerned about the Admiral's "political activity" when recommending his selection as CNO.⁸⁸

President Truman never indicated that his support for Admiral Denfeld was ever adversely affected by the CNO's political activities. Both men appeared to maintain good relations throughout 1948 and 1949 until the last days of the "Revolt of the Admirals." On 12 April 1948, Denfeld sent the President a hearty congratulatory note on the third anniversary of his inauguration. "It has been both an honor and a pleasure to serve you as Chief of Naval Operations. I am confident that I speak for all the officers and men of the Naval Establishment in assuring you of our continued support in these most trying times."⁸⁹ After Truman upset Governor Dewey in November to win a second term, Denfeld extended his "sincere and hearty congratulations," and asserted that "the country is fortunate in having your firm guidance during the difficult years ahead." He also offered Truman use of the CNO's quarters at the Naval Observatory during the upcoming White

⁸⁶Letter from Senator Robert Taft to Dudley White, publisher of the Sandusky, Ohio Register-Star-News, 31 December 1947, and letter from Admiral Denfeld to Dudley White, 20 February 1948, in Denfeld Papers, Naval Historical Center Archives, Box 6, File "W."

⁸⁷Ibid., Letter from Admiral Denfeld to John P. Marquand of Newburyport, Massachusetts, 12 August 1948, in Denfeld Papers, Naval Historical Center Archives, Box 4, File "M."

⁸⁸Millis, p. 325.

⁸⁹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to President Truman, 12 April 1948, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Central Files, Presidential Personal Correspondence Files, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

House renovations.⁹⁰ The President gratefully acknowledged this "generous expression of confidence in my leadership," and stated how "characteristically thoughtful" was Denfeld's offer of his "own quarters."⁹¹ Despite continuing inter-service battles and acknowledged political differences, the President and his CNO remained on good terms.

Secretary Forrestal also seemed to maintain a friendly and respectful relationship with the Admiral despite the Secretary's intense frustration with the interminable inter-service squabbling. In March 1948, Forrestal described his service chiefs (Bradley, Spaatz, and Denfeld) as "broad-minded and patriotic men."⁹² Admiral Denfeld always valued his relationship with Forrestal and, after his removal as CNO in 1949, proudly referred Congressional investigators to letters in which the late Secretary had attested to Denfeld's support for unification.⁹³ Despite this cordiality, Forrestal seems privately to have had reservations about the admiral. In early 1949, General Eisenhower recorded that the Secretary expressed trust in many Army officers, but of those in the Navy, thought "of only Sherman and Blandy among the higher ones, [and] possibly Connolly also."⁹⁴ Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, in their Forrestal biography, observed that the Navy's refusal to compromise and "its stiff-necked resistance to any cuts distressed him" to the extent that Forrestal "grew more disenchanted with the self-righteous arrogance of senior naval officers and their rigid peddling of the party line."⁹⁵ Given Denfeld's generally good relations with Forrestal, one wonders whether some effort on Denfeld's part to

⁹⁰Ibid., Letter from Admiral Denfeld to President Truman, 10 November 1948.

⁹¹Ibid., Letter from President Truman to Admiral Denfeld, 13 November 1948.

⁹²Letter from Secretary Forrestal to the Honorable E. V. Robertson, 30 March 1948, quoted in Millis, p. 404.

⁹³Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator William F. Knowland, 9 February 1950, p. 5, in Matthews Papers, Correspondence files, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁹⁴Arthur T. Hadley, *The Straw Giant: Triumph and Failure - America's Armed Forces*, (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 95, and Isenberg, p. 147.

⁹⁵Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), pp. 412-13.

mediate between the Secretary and the Navy's hard-liners might have eased the growing tensions. But, if such an opportunity ever existed, it was lost.

The Secretary of the Navy, John L. Sullivan was an intelligent and experienced administrator and no relation to the former heavyweight champ. He had served in the Executive Branch since 1939, holding positions in the Internal Revenue Service, the Treasury Department and the Navy Department, and rising to Navy Secretary when Forrestal assumed the leadership of the National Military Establishment in 1947. During his treasury service, Sullivan had established excellent ties with Congress and built on this strength by serving as the Navy's point man "on the hill" during his tenure in the Navy Department. Professors Albion and Connery observed that "he made brilliant appearances before Congressional committees," and he was respected throughout the administration for his experience and intelligence.⁹⁶

According to Sullivan's papers in the Truman Library, Admiral Denfeld maintained a good but stiff relationship with the Secretary. Their telephone conversations were always respectful and professional, and with the exception of occasional luncheon meetings, they engaged in little social contact or other pleasantries.⁹⁷ One indicator that the Secretary did not have complete confidence in the Admiral was that during a crisis involving the new flush-deck aircraft carrier, Sullivan called Radford back from California rather than rely on the advice of his CNO.⁹⁸

In this somewhat ambiguous position, Admiral Denfeld strove to develop plans and policies to ensure national security and protect the Navy's interests. Even before his selection as CNO, he had testified against proposed cuts in the Navy's budget. In March

⁹⁶Albion and Connery, pp. 211 and 301.

⁹⁷Sullivan Papers, Secretary of the Navy appointment calendar and correspondence files, Truman Library.

⁹⁸Ibid., 24 April 1949 transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Sullivan and Vice Admiral Radford.

1946, he had claimed that proposed reductions would make it impossible for the Navy to defend many of its Pacific bases against enemy attack. This charge elicited the following note to President Truman from budget director Harold Smith: "This is an extraordinary statement. Nimitz, in his testimony, at least says one cannot be dogmatic. Denfeld has no hesitancy, apparently, about being dogmatic."⁹⁹ Regardless of the political fallout, Admiral Denfeld consistently reiterated this view throughout his tenure. His opposition to budgetary reductions was certainly based on personal conviction rather than any parochial Navy "party line."

Denfeld was strongly committed to maintaining a balanced defense structure and consistently opposed excessively relying on any one weapons system or theory of warfare. He testified before Congress in April 1948 that "the three armed services must be kept in balance . . . [and that] it is even more important than before that the United States have the naval means to control the oceans between North America and Europe and North America and Asia."¹⁰⁰ In testimony on the following year's budget, Denfeld reiterated this position more explicitly:

We [the Navy] believe that only by maintaining a balanced composition, under the requirements of a sound strategic concept, can the National Military Establishment possess the necessary flexibility to meet and counter not only the most probable enemy action, but unexpected and unforeseen turns of events. . . . The unpredictable fortunes of war make it very unwise to be committed in advance to any single plan of action.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Letter from Harold Smith to President Truman, 21 March 1946, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Central Files, Presidential Personal Correspondence Files, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

¹⁰⁰U. S. Congress. Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Supplemental Hearings on the Department of the Navy Appropriation Bill, 1949, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, p. 79.

¹⁰¹Louis E. Denfeld, Admiral, USN, Statement to the Armed Services Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, on the Navy Budget for Fiscal Year 1950, 18 June 1949, In the White House Official Files, "Department of the Navy Correspondence - 1949," Truman Library.

Denfeld's statement seems very clear and correct in retrospect, but in the charged atmosphere of 1948, with defense budgets being drastically cut and many Americans believing in the omnipotence of the Air Force's strategic atomic bombing forces, few wanted to listen to an admiral who tried to justify the maintenance of a large fleet and other costly forces.

The inter-service battles of the late 1940s have often been interpreted as almost exclusively concerned with the distribution of funds, yet there was a more fundamental cause of disagreement. The JCS has responsibility for preparing the Nation's strategic defense plans and for recommending the military forces required to implement these plans. This task was greatly complicated by the lack of any clear, authoritative statement of objectives from the National Security Council, a body created by the 1947 National Security Act for just this purpose. President Truman appeared to illogically give priority to developing "a firm military policy" before attempting to formulate a national security strategy. That is to say he seemed to allow the capabilities of the armed services to determine the national security goals of the Nation. Although Secretaries Forrestal and Sullivan seemed to accept this procedure, Admiral Denfeld and Air Force Secretary Symington, in rare agreement, objected to this process as inverted.¹⁰² As the temperature of the Cold War gradually rose, the Joint Chiefs attempted to formulate strategic plans which could protect the Country and its allies while remaining under President Truman's very low budgetary ceilings. General Marshall accurately described the Joint Chiefs as

¹⁰²Letter from Secretary Sullivan to Secretary Forrestal, 9 July 1946, in the Sullivan Papers, Box 7, File "Unification," Truman Library, and W. Stuart Symington, "Our Air Force Policy," Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 July 1949, p. 567.

being obliged to craft grand strategic plans without adequate resources and contended that we are "playing with fire while we have nothing with which to put it out."¹⁰³

The Chief of Naval Operations offered some constructive original ideas on the best strategies for national defense, yet was consistently outvoted by the advocates of strategic air power. There was consensus that the only potential enemy was the Soviet Union, but how the U. S. might oppose the envisioned Red Army offensive across the North German plain was the subject of interminable debate. Secretary Forrestal succinctly captured this argument over strategy in a December 1947 letter:

There are really four outstanding military facts in the world at this time. They are: (1) The predominance of Russian land power in Europe and Asia. (2) The predominance of American sea power. (3) Our exclusive possession of the atomic bomb, and (4) American productive capability. As long as we can outproduce the world, can control the sea and can strike inland with the atomic bomb, we can assume certain risks otherwise unacceptable in an effort to restore world trade, to restore the balance of power - military power - and to eliminate some of the conditions which breed war.¹⁰⁴

Admiral Denfeld would have agreed with this summation with its emphasis on several aspects of American national power.¹⁰⁵

In JCS sessions as early as April 1948, Denfeld opposed the prevailing Administration inclination to rely on an atomic retaliatory offensive by suggesting alternative plans to defend America's European allies on the ground while striking at the invading Soviet forces from their Mediterranean and Northern flanks.¹⁰⁶ Another key

¹⁰³Kenneth W. Condit, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume II, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947-1949, (Washington: The Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1978), p. 18.

¹⁰⁴Letter from Secretary Forrestal to Chan Gurney, 8 December 1947, quoted in Millis, pp. 350-51.

¹⁰⁵Admiral Denfeld offered several similar statements before Congress during his term as CNO. See Louis E. Denfeld, Admiral, USN, Statement to the Armed Services Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, on the Navy Budget for Fiscal Year 1950, 18 June 1949, Contained in the White House Official Files, "Department of the Navy Correspondence - 1949," Truman Library for one example.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 278.

issue on which Admiral Denfeld and the President disagreed was the Administration's assumption that the budget only fund a military nucleus which could always be built up when additional force was required. In early 1949, the CNO pointed out in Senate testimony that although this strategy had worked in past crises, "it is unlikely that our allies will ever again absorb the brunt of an enemy's initial attack."¹⁰⁷ Any shift from either of these Administration strategies would have required both the maintenance of a strong fleet of aircraft carriers and much greater expenditures on the military in general, options which few voters or legislators were willing to accept.

Regardless of the opposition they encountered, the CNO and his fellow naval officers continued to criticize the Air Force's proposed "atomic blitz" strategy and recommend improvements in overall readiness. In a "spirited defense of the Navy's position" on 4 October 1948, Admiral Denfeld broadly criticized the Air Force's plans.

The unpleasant fact remains that the Navy has honest and sincere misgivings as to the ability of the Air Force successfully to deliver the [atomic] weapon by means of unescorted missions flown by present-day bombers, deep into enemy territory in the face of strong Soviet air defenses, and to drop it on targets whose locations are not accurately known.¹⁰⁸

This basic theme was to be reiterated in ever-increasing volume and frequency throughout the remainder of Denfeld's term as CNO.

Secretary Forrestal kept the President informed of the disagreements over strategic concepts within the JCS. In October 1948, Truman and Forrestal discussed the inability of American forces to operate in the Mediterranean theater in wartime under the current budget. The President authorized his Defense Secretary to prepare a "supplemental, back-up budget" that would fund operations in the Mediterranean, but Forrestal observed that he

¹⁰⁷Denfeld statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 18 June 1949.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 231-32, and Rearden, pp. 344-45.

did not seem overly concerned.¹⁰⁹ The only war plan the JCS could develop within existing budgetary constraints was one which called for a quick atomic strike by long-range bombers on the Soviet Union's centers of industrial production from bases in Great Britain and the United States while the American and allied armies gave ground in Western Europe and waited for the anticipated crippling of the enemy's industrial base to slow down his advance. Senior naval officers continued to oppose this atomic strike option, but the Administration considered the expense of preparing for other defensive measures to be unacceptably high.¹¹⁰

In 1948, American military leaders brought up an additional significant misgiving about the desirability of this atomic strategy. Given the decision to make the delivery of nuclear weapons the principal deterrent to Soviet aggression, it would have seemed logical to give the Defense Department control over those weapons to ensure their readiness for prompt use in event of a crisis. The leaders of the Defense Department discussed this proposal with President Truman on 21 July 1948. He rejected Secretary Forrestal's proposal on the grounds that the atomic bomb was not "a military weapon" and must be treated "differently from rifles and cannon and ordinary things like that."¹¹¹ The Joint Chiefs had thereby based their only affordable retaliatory strategy on the use of a weapon which they did not control and which might be denied to them in time of national emergency.

Because almost all of the JCS' strategic planning efforts were classified, public debate over the competing doctrines of strategic bombing and control of the seas found their best forum in the inter-service discussion about assignment of roles and missions to each armed service. Debates concerning the creation of a separate Air Force had not

¹⁰⁹Rearden, p. 345.

¹¹⁰Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 504.

¹¹¹McCullough, p. 650.

clearly defined the division of responsibilities within the NME between the three services, especially regarding aviation. When the President had signed the National Security Act of 1947, he had also approved Executive Order 9877 which specified the duties of the three services. The Air Force was assigned the primary responsibility of conducting strategic bombing operations, but the Navy also retained the responsibility to operate aircraft in pursuit of naval objectives, including the attack of inland targets as required to support the conduct of naval campaigns. These two services could not agree on how to differentiate between their missions and continued the public debates which had raged since the end of the war. Although a full examination of the nuances of the roles and missions debate is beyond the scope of this study, a brief survey of the major events and principal issues in this evolving argument is essential to understanding the eventual removal of Admiral Denfeld.¹¹²

Secretary Forrestal had become so exasperated by the ongoing bickering between his service chiefs that in early 1948 he decided that a four-day meeting of the Joint Chiefs away from Washington might facilitate these officers detaching themselves from their parochial service concerns and coming to some agreement on roles and missions. Forrestal restricted the attendees at this 11 - 14 March 1948 JCS conference at Key West, Florida to only two officers per service plus the Director of the Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Gruenther, and the President's Chief of Staff, Admiral Leahy. Representing the Navy were Admirals Denfeld and Radford. Generals Bradley and Wedemeyer attended for the Army, and Generals Spaatz and Norstadt were the Air Force's delegates.¹¹³ This dedicated, private session helped to settle some of the details. The various missions were divided into primary and secondary categories. The Air Force was given the primary mission of

¹¹²The best examinations of the struggles over roles and missions during this period are found in Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," and Jeffrey Barlow's The Revolt of the Admirals.

¹¹³Millis, p. 390.

conducting strategic bombing campaigns while the Navy was placed in a secondary, supporting position in this area. Denfeld gained the other services' acquiescence on the construction of the Navy's flush-deck carrier, but this agreement was actually illusory, because several of the delegates later claimed that their approval had either been conditional or merely acknowledging the fact that the President had already approved the carrier in the latest defense budget.¹¹⁴ These second thoughts were encouraged by the fact that no notes were taken during any of the sessions. Forrestal saw this conference as "the beginning of the effort to rebuild the Armed Forces of the United States," but few other participants thought as highly of the event.¹¹⁵

The inadequacy of the Key West agreements was best revealed by Forrestal's having again to sequester his Joint Chiefs in August 1948 at Newport, Rhode Island, to insist that they clarify the meaning of their earlier agreement. At this session, a stenographer was present to contribute some order and accountability to the deliberations.¹¹⁶ The concepts of "primary" and "secondary" mission areas were clarified and a special board, the Weapons System Evaluation Group, was created to independently assess the performance and suitability of weapons systems being developed by the services.¹¹⁷ Admiral Denfeld confidently issued a press release:

The words of our understanding are clear and to my mind unequivocal. They will serve if they are interpreted properly - in the spirit of "all for one and one for all." Any agreement will work only if the personnel of each service work

¹¹⁴Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," pp. 474 - 76 provides a good summary of the Key West Agreements and their impact on the Navy's carrier program. The theory that Denfeld traded the strategic bombing mission for approval of the carrier can be found in Mark Perry, Four Stars, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), pp. 10 - 24.

¹¹⁵Millis, p. 390.

¹¹⁶Jurika, p. 124.

¹¹⁷Rearden, p. 401.

together with sympathy and understanding and really desire to make it work.¹¹⁸

His assessment was overly optimistic. Either the other chiefs did not share his desire to make the Newport agreement work or the inertia of continuing struggle and budgetary pressures were too much for the two agreements to overcome. The squabbling and public affairs wars continued unabated.

The struggles for defense dollars were hardly unnecessary during this period. In the absence of any agreed upon strategic concept, each service prudently sought to retain as much "muscle" as possible to ensure it could meet its responsibilities. The funding allocated for the entire defense establishment in Fiscal Year (FY) 1946 (1 October 1945 through 30 September 1946) was \$45 billion, or over two thirds of the total government budget.¹¹⁹ In FY 1947, the first true post-war budget, the military's allocation dropped to \$14.26 billion and fell to its post-war low of \$11.9 billion the following year.¹²⁰ After having led their services to victory in a war during which projects were usually funded with little discussion, the admirals and generals adjusted with difficulty to the lean years of peace. President Truman believed that "Army and Navy professionals seldom had any idea of the value of money. They did not seem to care what the cost was."¹²¹

Secretary Forrestal disagreed with the Chief Executive by giving the admirals a back-handed compliment: "even naval officers were not economic fools . . . [and] recognized . . . that by forfeiting a sound economy at home we could stumble into state socialism just as successfully as if we had marked our course for that harbor."¹²² Even

¹¹⁸Admiral Denfeld's statement following the conference was included in an Office of the Secretary of Defense press release and is quoted in Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 487.

¹¹⁹Millis, p. 352.

¹²⁰Roger R. Trask, The Secretaries of Defense: A Brief History, 1947 - 1985, (Washington: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1985), p. 63.

¹²¹Harry S. Truman, Memoirs, Vol. I, Year of Decisions, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1955), p. 88.

¹²²Millis, p. 250.

with this understanding, the Joint Chiefs agreed in 1948 that the ceilings imposed by the President were too low "to implement national policy in any probable war situation that can be seen."¹²³ Nevertheless, the ceilings remained and Forrestal's protests to the President contributed to Truman's growing dissatisfaction with his Defense Secretary.

The President continued to view the military leaders' claims as "excessive," and considered Denfeld and the Navy to be the "worst offenders."¹²⁴ Truman assessed what might be required for military sufficiency in light of all civil and military needs, and gave a priority to balancing the budget over funding the latest weapons upgrades. Essentially what occurred was Truman funded all other programs and gave the military the remainder as its budget ceiling. He firmly believed that war was not imminent and that short-term defense cuts to improve the economy would be a good investment.¹²⁵ In 1948, when Congress overwhelmingly approved a supplement of \$822 million for additional Air Force groups above the President's request, Truman impounded the funds and would not allow the Air Force to spend them.¹²⁶ Although Congress did support this particular Air Force request, both political parties sought to reduce defense spending. Republican Senator Robert Taft, a committed isolationist, advocated cutting an additional \$6 billion from the existing \$11.9 billion FY 1948 military budget. Even without Senator Taft's cuts, the federal government concluded FY 1948 with a cash surplus of \$8.4 billion.¹²⁷ Denfeld strongly opposed the general policy of seeking ever deeper reductions. In his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on 19 May 1948, he stated: "It is axiomatic

¹²³JCS memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, 8 November 1948, quoted in Condit, p. 241.

¹²⁴Truman, Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 34.

¹²⁵President Truman was quoted in 4 May 1950's New York Times as asserting "repeatedly that he saw no possibility that the 'cold war' would develop into a shooting war and [he] even promised to reduce the defense budget next year [FY 1951]." The North Koreans attacked their Southern neighbors less than two months later, destroying his reduction plans.

¹²⁶Haynes, p. 124. The Congressional votes were House: 343-3, Senate: 74-2.

¹²⁷James T. Patterson, Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 373.

that military strength insufficient to support national policy is dangerous to national security and ineffective as a means of preserving the peace."¹²⁸ One weakness in Admiral Denfeld's argument was that the only existing "national policy" was that supporting fiscal restraint.

These dramatic fiscal restrictions and the ongoing roles and missions debate provided more than enough fuel to keep the inter-service arguments flaming during Admiral Denfeld's term as CNO. Despite clear and repeated direction from the President and the Secretary of Defense, military officers and their civilian supporters continued to take their cases to the public in one sensational series of accusations after another. While Vice Admiral Carney urged naval officers to "subordinate your Navy partisanship to the laws, rules, and regulations of unification in furtherance of the goal of an American military team," other officers like Rear Admiral Gallery and General Spaatz used the media to vent their frustrations and tout their points of view.¹²⁹ Although this behavior was not limited to naval officers, the sea service took the lion's share of the blame for these activities, apparently only because their publicity efforts were uncoordinated and clumsy when compared to the Air Force's polished campaign.

The Navy's public relations office reported to the Secretary of the Navy rather than to the CNO, and it received little support or emphasis during this period. In his 1947 report to the Secretary of Defense and the President, Secretary Sullivan devoted less than one page to public affairs in his 83-page submission. In the following year's report

¹²⁸U. S. Congress. House, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Department of the Navy Appropriation Bill, 1949, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office), p. 23.

¹²⁹Vice Admiral Carney speech to the U. S. Naval Academy, 24 May 1949. Transcript in the Matthews Papers, File "Various Speeches and Statements," Truman Library. Rear Admiral Gallery, a member of Denfeld's staff, was extremely prolific, turning out several articles during this period including one entitled "If This be Treason . . ." General Spaatz became a Newsweek columnist upon retiring from the Air Force in 1948.

Sullivan did not even mention the activities of his public relations office.¹³⁰ In his Revolt of the Admirals, Jeffrey Barlow concludes that:

the Navy seemed to view public relations as something of a necessary evil. The service's senior leadership had little understanding of the importance of getting their message across to the public until it was far too late to do much about it.¹³¹

Not until late in 1949 was the Navy's Office of Public Relations shifted to Admiral Denfeld's control in the Office of the CNO.

The Air Force consistently and effectively used its Congressional supporters and the press first to gain its independence from the Army, and then to promote its 70-group Air Force program. The Finletter and Brewster Boards, two studies of the Nation's military aviation policy commissioned in 1947 by Congress and the Executive Branch, generally supported the Air Force's positions. The Finletter Board's report showed especial partiality to the Air Force in advocating a large build up of that service and a deemphasis of Army and Navy responsibilities.¹³² The aggressive public relations campaign of the Air Force in 1947 masked what was actually a paper tiger. The longest range bombers in its strategic retaliatory force could not reach the Soviet Union from the United States, and other serious shortcomings plagued the "junior service." Kenneth Moll has argued that in 1947, the Air Force's "intelligence was poor [and] its readiness

¹³⁰John L. Sullivan, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1947, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 82, and Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1948, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949).

¹³¹Jeffrey G. Barlow, Revolt of the Admirals, (Washington: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1994), p. 227. Paul Hammond provides an alternate theory as to why the Air Force's public relations efforts were so successful relative to the Navy's. He notes that Denfeld and Sullivan were essentially committed to supporting the Defense Secretary's position of maintaining balanced forces while Secretary Symington and Generals Spaatz and Vandenberg were in opposition. Their ideas were therefore fresh and newsworthy. ("Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 481)

¹³²Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 480.

marginal. Its long-range capabilities were nonexistent, and [the low level of] the A-bomb stockpile was shocking."¹³³ But by listening to the claims of Air Force officers and their supporters, an uninformed observer might have concluded that the Air Force was all that the United States needed to ensure its national security.

The extended public brawling over roles, missions and funds angered the civilian heads of the NME and the Government. Secretary Forrestal and President Truman attempted to restrict the public statements by military leaders but were unable to muzzle them effectively. The most difficult type of statement to restrict was the officers' testimony to Congress. Because as witnesses, they were under oath and were routinely asked for their personal opinions, there was no way the Chief Executive could order them to advocate policies they did not agree with. As early as 1945, President Truman's position was explained by Clark Clifford as follows:

The President felt that civil and naval personnel of the Navy Department should no longer publicly attack unification, since it was administration policy. However, if called to testify before Congress, these individuals should feel free to express their opinions, after first explaining to the Committee that they were expressing personal views under leave to do so granted by the commander in chief.¹³⁴

In mid-1946, Truman modified this seemingly fair policy as propagandists continued to embarrass the Administration with their inability to "toe the party line." He directed that the services support the new unification measure once it was officially submitted to Congress, because it would by that time have "become administration doctrine and he

¹³³Kenneth L. Moll, "Nuclear Strategy, 1945 - 1949: America's First Four Years," Master's thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1965, p. 158. Robert F. Futrell's Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 - 1960, (Montgomery, Alabama: Air University Press, 1989), pages 237 - 59 provides an excellent overview of the Air Force's doctrinal and strategic thought during this period.

¹³⁴Haynes, pp. 98 - 99.

would expect complete support for it in Congress."¹³⁵ These presidential views on what was and was not permissible in Congressional testimony would become especially pertinent during the debates over the late 1949 removal of Admiral Denfeld. Many contended that his removal was a reprisal for his frank testimony, which he had identified as his personal opinion in accordance with this administration policy.

Between 1946 and 1949, the civilian leaders of the NME were forced repeatedly to clarify their policies on the expression of dissent and the promotion of individual service virtues. Assistant Secretary of Defense William Frye was probably stating the obvious when he declared that "discipline and authority . . . are the inescapable methods of control. Without them, a military organization is useless in war and a menace in peace."¹³⁶ Nevertheless, a firm hand was often lacking in the Defense Department during the Forrestal years. Dr. Hammond noted that while the Secretary personally preferred to settle contentious issues through private discussion, he "seemed to uphold as a matter of principle the right of his own subordinates to dissent in public."¹³⁷ Truman tried to reiterate his ground rules in May 1948 by directing the service Secretaries and Chiefs to "subordinate their private and service biases to the established national policies."¹³⁸ But Air Force Secretary Symington continued to make so many inflammatory and partisan public statements that Forrestal finally began to consider removing him in July 1948.¹³⁹

General Bradley, the Chief of Staff of the Army, acknowledged that his Air Force step-children were "in open defiance of Truman" and that their actions were "vastly complicating the JCS' job of producing unified war plans and budgets," yet he was unable

¹³⁵President Truman in September 1946, quoted in Haynes, p. 103.

¹³⁶Frye, p. 544.

¹³⁷Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 478.

¹³⁸Memorandum from President Truman to the Air Force Chief of Staff, et al., 13 May 1948, quoted in Haynes, p. 124.

¹³⁹Millis, pp. 463 - 64, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 480.

to exert any influence to put an end to the campaigns. Bradley observed that General Eisenhower shared his dismay, characterizing the activities of the leaders of the Navy and Air Force as "near insubordination."¹⁴⁰ Returning to the Congressional testimony problem, Secretary Forrestal issued guidance to his service leaders in November 1948, encouraging them to defend their services' capabilities to the best of their abilities but stated that he thought inappropriate and certainly not "conducive to the spirit of unification," any attack or criticism of the competence of another service.¹⁴¹ Despite these warnings, the "mud slinging" continued. A self-proclaimed aviation expert, William Bradford Huie, launched the next salvo by publishing a series of articles in the popular Readers' Digest "wholly critical of naval aviation. Many Navy leaders believed that he had been paid by the Air Force."¹⁴² Secretary Forrestal discussed this problem with the President in January 1949 and forwarded a draft speech to him to use to direct the service Secretaries and military chiefs to "keep their differences within military circles or resign," but this shot was never fired.¹⁴³

Probably the most effective weapon in the Air Force's publicity arsenal was its ability to take its weapons platforms almost anywhere in the country and display their glamorous and awesome power. On the first Air Force Day, 18 September 1948, the Air Force staged "massive flights of B-29s over some of the major American cities [and] flights of five B-36s over 103 separate cities in the United States."¹⁴⁴ Record breaking feats and air shows converted many citizens to the Air Force's way of thinking. In March 1949 an Air Force B-50 bomber, using new aerial refueling techniques, completed a non-

¹⁴⁰Omar N. Bradley, General of the Army, U.S. Army, (Ret) and Clay Blair, A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 491.

¹⁴¹Millis, p. 516.

¹⁴²Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 489.

¹⁴³Millis, p. 545.

¹⁴⁴Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 486.

stop flight around the world, making front pages across the land. Shortly thereafter the new B-36 bomber made a widely publicized 5,000 mile flight carrying a simulated atomic bomb.¹⁴⁵ To further amplify the importance of this feat, someone leaked to the press an account of a secret Air Force briefing to the JCS that highlighted 70 strategic Russian targets now within the range of the B-36. This leak caused Congressman Carl Vinson, the powerful Chairman of the House Armed Service Committee, to declare that further indiscretions would lead to a full Congressional investigation.¹⁴⁶ Several months later, Secretary Forrestal's funeral was the scene of one of the most unusual of the inter-service snubs. In a final act of partisan defiance, all service Secretaries except the Air Force's Symington were chosen to serve as pall bearers.¹⁴⁷ There was no way to prevent bitterness of this depth from being revealed.

The essential question raised in all attempts to limit public statements by Service Chiefs was: "What were the rights and status of military officials regarding freedom of expression?" Political appointees clearly served at the pleasure of the President and could be expected to support his policies until they found themselves in a situation where their integrity might be in jeopardy, such as being asked for their personal views while testifying under oath, or in purely individual matters like funerals. Military officers, on the other hand, were appointed to positions of authority in order to provide unbiased advice and guidance on military matters to the President and Congress. Although they received their commissions from the President and served at his pleasure, they were expected to be less politically-constrained, and consequently of value to Congress and the Executive Branch as neutral technical advisers. A Joint Chiefs of Staff filled with "yes men" would not serve the needs of the Nation. Conversely, Joint Chiefs who could not follow orders or accept

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 491.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Boettcher, p. 171.

direction from the President in matters which did not compromise their personal honor also threatened the very fabric of the government. Commitment to a common goal and mutual respect was required to make this arrangement work. In the late 1940s, these preconditions were often missing, as senior officers were politicized by the Administration.

Admiral Denfeld actively participated in these bitter exchanges and deserves at least as much blame as any other member of the NME's leadership for this group's unseemly behavior. As CNO he was charged with establishing and enforcing standards of conduct for his subordinates. Even though most of Denfeld's public statements were professional and responsible, as the uniformed leader of the Navy, he was accountable to the Commander in Chief for any rash or intemperate actions or statements by his subordinates. The 1924 Guide to Naval Leadership, a standard text during Denfeld's early career, offered 20 "points of the naval profession" to guide naval leaders. Among those were number 18 - "before you take any action . . . consider carefully its effect upon the discipline of the organization," and number 20 - "avoid, as you would the plague, hostile criticism of authority."¹⁴⁸ Admiral Denfeld understood principle 20 and did restrain his growing frustration with his superiors, but he failed to take into account the effect his passive leadership had on the discipline of the Navy. His lack of assertiveness actually encouraged other naval officers to speak out, thereby diminishing his authority within the Navy and contributing to the growing public perception that he was losing control over his immediate subordinates. The Navy appeared rebellious and out of control in contrast to the single-minded Air Force, which despite occasional brash and insubordinate outbursts, maintained a unified front before the public. There is no indication that the Secretary of the Navy, the President, or anyone else drew this conclusion in time to counsel Denfeld

¹⁴⁸Leo H. Thebaud, comp., Naval Leadership With Some Hints to Junior Officers and Others, (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1924), p. 154.

about his leadership deficiencies, but it seems obvious that the inability of the CNO to keep his subordinates in line contributed to his eventual fall from favor.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND THE
CANCELLATION OF THE 'SUPERCARRIER' (MARCH THROUGH MAY 1949)

"Owing to the cancellation of the supercarrier, there was a vicious mutiny afoot in the Navy. With his crazy bull-in-the-china-shop approach, Johnson was in no way fitted to deal with it. Nor was his decent but weak and inexperienced Navy Secretary, Frank Matthews. A Navy mutiny could conceivably tear apart the Department of Defense, possibly tempting the Kremlin to capitalize on our military disarray." (1949 - General Bradley)¹⁴⁹

"The better I got to know Mr. Matthews the more certain I became that his appointment as Secretary of the Navy verged on a national catastrophe." (1949 - Admiral Radford)¹⁵⁰

James Forrestal, the Nation's first Secretary of Defense, had served the Roosevelt administration since June 1940. President Roosevelt had recruited him from the most experienced leaders of the business community to help improve the organization and efficiency of the Executive Branch. His naval service in World War I led him to gravitate to the military Departments, and he became Under Secretary of the Navy before Pearl Harbor.¹⁵¹ Forrestal's natural tendency was to go slowly and study every issue fully before coming to any decision. He believed that one risked damaging morale and the service's cohesion through rapid and ill-conceived changes and therefore often delayed implementing seemingly obvious improvements in the Department's organization to allow the dust to settle from previous efforts. This slowness and apparent indecisiveness eventually contributed to Truman's growing disenchantment with his Defense Secretary

¹⁴⁹Bradley and Blair, p. 505.

¹⁵⁰Jurika, p. 176.

¹⁵¹Forrestal was actually a qualified naval aviator, earning his wings in 1917 as "Naval Aviator Number 154." He did not see any combat service before he returned to business in 1918. Millis, p. xix.

during 1948 and 1949.¹⁵² Additionally, the Secretary's firm stands in opposition to the recognition of Israel, in favor of military control over the Country's atomic arsenal, and especially, his insistent demands for more money frustrated the President. For his part, Forrestal "found himself thinking less and less of a President who seemed so willing to cave in to cheap political expediency."¹⁵³ Shortly after Truman began his second term, he decided to replace Forrestal, who he believed "had worked himself to a state of near collapse."¹⁵⁴ Soon after his being relieved by Louis Johnson on 28 March 1949, James Forrestal experienced a mental breakdown. He was admitted to a hospital for observation, but there was to be no recovery. Forrestal jumped to his death from an unguarded window less than two months after leaving office, becoming the first casualty of military unification. More casualties were soon to follow.

In Louis Johnson, Truman found the solution to his frustrations with an indecisive Defense Secretary who was not supportive of his economy programs. Johnson, a wealthy lawyer from West Virginia, had a reputation for getting quick results through aggressive leadership. He was not afraid to make decisions and, right or wrong, he was rarely at a loss for a course of action. As early as February 1948, Admiral Denfeld anticipated that Johnson would succeed Forrestal. The CNO wrote to a friend that he had met Johnson in 1948 and believed that this personal relationship "may enable us to do something to keep the Navy where it should be."¹⁵⁵ Still unclear is why Denfeld thought that this one brief meeting had enabled him to convert Johnson from his strong commitment to air power and firm allegiance to the Army. The CNO was in for a great disappointment. The worst of the inter-service struggles were yet to come.

¹⁵²McCullough, pp. 736 - 37.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 599.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 736.

¹⁵⁵Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Dudley White, an Ohio newspaper publisher, 28 February 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 6, Correspondence File "W," Naval Historical Center Archives.

Washington press correspondents remembered Johnson from his term as Assistant Secretary of War in the late 1930s and described him as "cold, self-seeking, and hard-driving, . . . He is iron-willed, self-confident, and self-sufficient."¹⁵⁶ Johnson was born in Roanoke, Virginia, the son of a grocer.¹⁵⁷ He worked his way through law school and was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates in 1917, serving as Speaker of that body during his first term. Johnson served in the Army during the First World War, rising to the rank of Captain before returning home after the Armistice. Even at this early juncture, Johnson did not hesitate to make waves when he thought something needed to be done. On his return voyage from Europe, Johnson drafted a 67-page letter to the Secretary of War, setting forth "cogent ideas he had thought up for improving the Army."¹⁵⁸ Following the War he became the leading partner in the law firm of Steptoe and Johnson and helped found the American Legion, serving as its national commander from 1932 through 1933. This service, and his aggressive campaign support for President Roosevelt, led to his 1937 selection as Assistant Secretary of War. In this position, Johnson vocally supported universal military training, rearmament, and an expansion of military aviation, but he was eased out when Secretary Stimson took over the Department in 1940.¹⁵⁹

Louis Johnson was an impressive individual who stood over six feet tall and weighed over 250 pounds. His bald head and booming voice added to his powerful image. He had been out of government for eight years when President Truman called on him for help in managing the finances of his foundering reelection campaign in mid-1948.

¹⁵⁶Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, The Truman MERRY-GO-ROUND, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), p. 448.

¹⁵⁷Jack Alexander, "Stormy New Boss of the Pentagon," Saturday Evening Post, 30 July 1951, p. 68. Alexander's contemporary profile of Secretary Johnson is an excellent overview of this complex man.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁹Trask, p. 12.

Johnson's connections, forceful personality, and loyalty to his Party helped raise millions for the President and helped him upset Governor Dewey in the November election. This yeoman work certainly merited a reward, and Johnson and Truman decided that the Defense Department would be the right place for Johnson to exercise his dynamic qualities.¹⁶⁰ Jack Alexander observed that unlike Forrestal, Johnson was "not much concerned with diplomatic niceties."¹⁶¹ He charged into his new duties and rapidly changed the entire atmosphere in the National Military Establishment. David McCullough reported that "he hit the Pentagon like a cyclone."¹⁶²

Truman felt confident his new Secretary of Defense could force the Joint Chiefs to agree on budgets within the Administration's ceilings and put a stop to the incessant bickering within the Pentagon. Johnson was able to force through budgets even below the President's goals, yet even he could not suppress disagreements between the professional officers under his command. In fact, his hard-fisted methods actually exacerbated some of the issues, adding fuel to the fire and sparking the "revolt of the admirals" in 1949. Johnson's personal ambition of succeeding Truman as President in 1952 motivated him to try to make a distinctive mark, and his lack of restraint made his mark much more a crater than a footprint. General Bradley later remarked that Johnson "was probably the worst appointment Truman had made." In light of Johnson's aggressive and seemingly irrational behavior, Bradley further commented that Truman had in fact "replaced one mental case with another." Eventually Johnson was found to have developed a brain tumor, but no evidence indicates that this adversely affected his personality in the late 1940s.¹⁶³ Louis Johnson was by nature an aggressive man.

¹⁶⁰McCullough, p. 678.

¹⁶¹Alexander, p. 67.

¹⁶²McCullough, p. 741.

¹⁶³Blair and Bradley, p. 503.

The new Secretary of Defense relieved Forrestal on 28 March 1949, the same day the North Atlantic Alliance was formed. At his first press conference, Johnson promised the President his support and stated that "to the limit the present law allows, I promise you there will be unification as rapidly as the efficiency of the service permits it."¹⁶⁴ Johnson was determined to centralize the Defense Department as much as possible and consolidate his power over the services to avoid the frustrations experienced by Forrestal.¹⁶⁵ He had enormous confidence in his ability to get quick results on all problems facing the Department. Admiral Radford observed that Johnson "had not the slightest doubt of his ability to fairly settle any question, military or otherwise."¹⁶⁶ Johnson saw his position as the President's point man in the Defense Department who would enforce the President's will on this bureaucracy and its avaricious generals and admirals.¹⁶⁷ Johnson had no intention of weighing complex variables or developing various options before making any hard and fast decisions. He believed his imposition of firm budgetary limits would force the military establishment to become more efficient in its use of personnel and resources.

With regard to the festering service rivalries, the new Secretary had a plan to resolve them promptly. At his first press conference, Johnson asserted that anyone who objected to his program to settle inter-service disputes "would have a chance to argue me out of that conclusion in the next couple of days." Thereafter anyone who still disagreed would be forced out of the organization; "there will just not be room for them around the Pentagon and I told the three Secretaries that."¹⁶⁸ To make it clear who was in charge,

¹⁶⁴Trask, p. 12.

¹⁶⁵Secretary Sullivan recalled that when Johnson took over, the Department of Defense staff totaled fifty people including secretaries and drivers. By the time Johnson left office in late 1950, this staff had grown to over twenty-thousand. Sullivan interview, transcript p. 58.

¹⁶⁶Jurika, p. 149.

¹⁶⁷Lawrence J. Korb, "The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Conflict in the Budgetary Process, 1947 - 1971," Naval War College Review, December 1971, p. 25.

¹⁶⁸Jurika, p. 148.

Johnson ousted the Secretary of the Army from the best office in the Pentagon, and settled in himself. He also had General Pershing's impressive wooden desk moved into his new office, thereby creating quite a stir in the five-sided building. Despite Admiral Denfeld's earlier impression that Johnson would be objective, General Bradley quickly recognized Johnson as "an unstinting airpower advocate."¹⁶⁹ Secretary Johnson had served as a director of Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, the manufacturer of the B-36 bomber, before returning to government service in 1949 and had come to believe in the economic virtues of airpower over the more costly sea and land forces. The inter-service rivalry and especially its public manifestations had also instilled in Johnson a particular dislike for the Navy.¹⁷⁰

Robert Allen and William Shannon provided a humorous and perceptive anecdote concerning the Navy and the new Secretary in their 1950 book, The Washington MERRY-GO-ROUND that clearly illustrates the relationship between the Navy and the new Defense Secretary:

A young [Navy] Lieutenant did not show up at his Pentagon desk one day, and his colleagues became concerned. One recalled that the Lieutenant had expressed the intention to stand outside the Russian Embassy and tell the Soviet Ambassador to go to hell and take Joe Stalin with him. "If he really did that, it could be serious," an officer said. A hurried check disclosed that, sure enough, the young Lieutenant was in the hospital. His friends rushed over to see him. They asked if he had gone through with his daring plan. "I sure did," he replied. "I waited till the Ambassador came out and then I yelled, "to hell with Stalin," and the Ambassador shouted, "to hell with Louis Johnson." We were embracing each other in the middle of the street when a taxi hit me."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Blair and Bradley, p. 502.

¹⁷⁰Robert W. Love, Jr., ed., The Chiefs of Naval Operations, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980), p. 198.

¹⁷¹Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, The Truman MERRY-GO-ROUND, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), p. 445.

Few in the Navy Department were surprised when Secretary Johnson quickly trained his sights on the sea services.

In keeping with his reputation, Johnson instituted dramatic changes within the first few weeks of taking over. In an effort to strengthen his hand over the service propaganda machines, he ordered all public affairs matters centralized in his office and that all proposed public statements by military officers and civilian employees first be routed through his staff "for security review" before being released.¹⁷² This move did not single out any service, yet Navy advocates quickly became frustrated as this centralization policy was rescinded and then reimposed with no apparent rationale.

Admiral Denfeld found himself in opposition to the new Secretary almost immediately. Secretary Forrestal, before his tragic breakdown, had submitted a proposal to Congress to strengthen the Secretary of Defense's control over his Department. In Senatorial debate on an amendment to Forrestal's proposal which was supported by the Administration and Secretary Johnson, the CNO spoke on behalf of the JCS against the amendment in testimony on 7 April 1949. The Administration's amendment aimed to remove the specific statutory duties of the JCS from the unification law and permit the Defense Secretary more organizational flexibility. In this case Denfeld's logical argument was persuasive and helped defeat the new Secretary's proposal.¹⁷³ But this victory was short-lived. On the same day, in another move to assert his control over the Department, Johnson abolished the annual celebrations of the three military departments and consolidated the three service holidays into Armed Forces Day, to be celebrated on the third Saturday in May starting in 1950.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷²Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 493.

¹⁷³Rearden, pp. 51 - 52.

¹⁷⁴Boettcher, p. 173.

The most spectacular action during Johnson's first month in office came on 23 April 1949 when the Secretary precipitously canceled the construction of the Navy's new flush-deck carrier in the interest of economy. This vessel's keel had been laid thirteen days earlier, and millions of dollars had already been spent in equipment procurement and obligated contracts, dollars which had been painfully saved through the cancellation of other Navy construction programs over the previous several years.¹⁷⁵ The Navy had mortgaged its future for this ship, intending it as a prototype to demonstrate the ability of aircraft carriers to carry the latest military aircraft whose weight and size made them unable to operate from the existing ships. This new carrier, to be named the U.S.S. United States, would be unique in that it would not have a superstructure, or "island," protruding above its flight deck. An artist's drawing of the proposed design in relation to other classes of aircraft carriers is attached at Appendix II. Although the U.S.S. United States was to be only 100 feet longer than the Navy's biggest existing carriers, its capabilities and radical appearance, exaggerated in no little measure by the Air Force's spectacular charges, became known publicly as a "supercarrier."¹⁷⁶

By adding this new carrier to the fleet, the Navy expected to extend the range of offensive strikes and even operate aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons, an option which incensed the Air Force's leaders. They strongly objected to the Navy's development of a costly, mobile, nuclear launching platform which could compete with their bombers in carrying out one of their primary missions, strategic bombing. Denfeld

¹⁷⁵The best unbiased discussion of the events and positions leading to the construction of the U.S.S. United States can be found in the House Armed Services Committee's report on the Navy's proposal to cancel thirteen other ships already authorized and under construction to free up funds for the new carrier. U. S. Congress. House, Committee on Armed Services, Stoppage of Work on Certain Combatant Vessels, H. Rept. 2269, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., 1948, In Harry S. Truman, Official Files, File "Navy, 1948" Truman Library.

¹⁷⁶Louis E. Denfeld, Admiral, USN (Ret.), "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 33.

and the other admirals claimed that the capabilities of this new ship were required to ensure that the Navy maintained its ability to control the seas, its primary mission. The Air Force leaders did not accept this argument and consistently objected to the proposed vessel. In all JCS discussions since the Key West Conference where the carrier had been mentioned, Generals Spaatz and Vandenberg voted against its construction on the grounds that it was an unnecessary and wasteful duplication of the Air Force's capabilities.

The cancellation of this vital Navy project may be likened to a breeze which fanned the smoldering Navy rebellion into flames. How and why this cancellation occurred is examined in Paul Hammond's "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers" and Jeffrey Barlow's The Revolt of the Admirals. They adequately analyze this decision, whose understanding is necessary to comprehend the events of late 1949 which cost Admiral Denfeld his position. Consequently, this thesis provides only a brief overview of Admiral Denfeld's involvement in the cancellation controversy in order to facilitate understanding the later stages of the "revolt" and the CNO's removal.

The initial idea for a flush-deck carrier capable of carrying large jet aircraft has been credited to Admiral Marc Mitscher, one of the Navy's ablest World War II carrier commanders. His 1946 proposal to Admiral Nimitz started the planning for such a ship. Funding for its construction was allocated by Congress and approved by the President in fiscal years 1947, 1948, and 1949. Mitscher had calculated that a flush-deck carrier would be required in order to operate the larger, modern jet aircraft. Moreover, the 1946 atomic tests against anchored ships in the Bikini Atoll also indicated another advantage to reducing the ship's cross section by removing the superstructure. A flush-deck carrier would be much less susceptible to damage than a conventional carrier from the powerful shock waves produced by a nuclear explosion.¹⁷⁷ To allow the continued allocation of

¹⁷⁷Rearden, pp. 389 - 90.

funds for the new carrier, in 1948 the Navy decided to stop the construction of thirteen ships, including the battleships Kentucky and Hawaii which were to be converted into prototype rocket-launching vessels. The United States was the only naval vessel above destroyer-size under construction during 1948 and 1949.¹⁷⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not asked to approve the new carrier in 1947, because its construction had been authorized before the military unification law was enacted. Only at Key West did Secretary Forrestal and Admiral Denfeld seek the Chiefs' approval of this project. Later, the Army and Air Force Chiefs claimed that the carrier project was not presented to them for consideration but was described to them as a project already approved by the Secretary of Defense and the President and funded by Congress.¹⁷⁹ Later JCS discussions of the flush-deck carrier project were similarly ambiguous. Admiral Denfeld testified to Congress in early 1949 that the JCS had "approved" the carrier project on three separate occasions in 1948, but Bradley and Vandenberg never agreed to having voted on it except when it had been presented as a *fait accompli*.¹⁸⁰ In preparing the fiscal year 1950 defense budget, Forrestal was eventually able to get the Service Chiefs to agree on all issues except funding construction of the new carrier. He wrote to Charles Wilson that this was a "question I had to resolve myself."¹⁸¹ Despite the carrier's inclusion in the budget, Bradley noted in his memoirs that he sensed Truman had lost enthusiasm for the project by December 1948.¹⁸² In one of its few publicity victories the Navy obtained the President's permission on 2 February 1949 to

¹⁷⁸Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," p. 33.

¹⁷⁹Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 475.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 481.

¹⁸¹Letter from Secretary Forrestal to Charles E. Wilson, 18 September 1948, in Millis, p. 493. Wilson served as the fifth Secretary of Defense under Eisenhower beginning in 1953.

¹⁸²Bradley and Blair, p. 497.

name the new carrier the United States, giving it added patriotic stature.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, the carrier's \$189 million price tag in a defense budget of \$11 billion made it one of the most expensive new weapons systems and an attractive target for the budget cutters.

Admiral Denfeld was convinced that the flush-deck carrier was the most important new project being developed by the Navy. Aircraft carrier operations had proved essential to victory in the Pacific theater, and were expected to be equally essential in future efforts by the U. S. Navy to control the sea lines of communication between North America and any area of military operations. Although the United States would be capable of operating nuclear-capable bombers, the CNO asserted that strategic bombing was never considered to be a primary responsibility of the carrier. He said that it had more than enough naval missions to carry out without adding any responsibilities assigned to the Air Force.¹⁸⁴ On 15 April 1949, shortly after Johnson became Secretary of Defense, the keel of the new carrier was laid in a Virginia drydock, but this ship was not to experience any smooth sailing.

At a news conference on the twelfth of April, Johnson replied to a query about the future of the Navy's carrier project by stating that his opinion would be forthcoming. On the fifteenth, he asked General Eisenhower to obtain the Joint Chiefs' current views on the project.¹⁸⁵ Navy Secretary Sullivan approached Johnson on the twenty-first and asked to discuss the carrier. The Secretary of Defense was too busy to see him, but did promise that he would confer with Sullivan before making any decision about the ship. The Joint Chiefs' opinions were predictable. Admiral Denfeld strongly supported the construction of the United States while both Generals Bradley and Vandenberg opposed its continuation.

¹⁸³Memorandum from Rear Admiral R. L. Dennison, President Truman's Naval Aide, to Secretary Sullivan, 2 February 1949, in Sullivan Papers, Box 10.

¹⁸⁴Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," p. 33.

¹⁸⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 493.

Admiral Denfeld, as the senior member of the Joint Chiefs (the Joint Chiefs did not have a Chairman yet), delivered the three written opinions to the Secretary of Defense on Saturday, 23 April 1949. Johnson, who had expected this verdict, called General Eisenhower at Key West where he was recuperating from an illness. Eisenhower also opposed the new ship's construction. To ensure Congressional support for cancellation of the project, Johnson received concurrence from the Chairmen of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, Representative Vinson and Senator Tydings, and then notified the President of his decision. Secretary Sullivan was then in Texas delivering a speech to the Reserve Officers' Association. Neither he nor Denfeld were given an opportunity to discuss the decision. In fact Admiral Denfeld was still in the Secretary's offices 45 minutes after delivering the JCS' memos when the already mimeographed press release announcing the cancellation of the carrier was passed out.

The CNO was very upset, but Secretary Sullivan, who heard about Johnson's action on the radio, was absolutely livid. Sullivan believed that Johnson had broken his promise to wait until he had discussed the carrier with the Defense Secretary before taking any action.¹⁸⁶ He also objected to the method of the cancellation and Johnson's disregard for his advice and opinion. Sullivan initially intended to protest to President Truman, but, when he found out that Johnson had obtained the President's concurrence, scrapped his plans for an appeal and instead drafted a fiery letter of resignation.¹⁸⁷ He met with Truman on Monday, 25 April and delivered his letter to Johnson on the next day.

Secretary Sullivan's anger at the cancellation was aimed at Johnson and not the President. Sullivan felt that Johnson's economy program was the Defense Secretary's own creation and that Johnson's "unannounced candidacy" for the Presidency in 1952 was the

¹⁸⁶Sullivan interview, p. 59.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., and Sullivan appointment calendar, 24 April 1949, Sullivan Papers, Box 9, Truman Library.

motivation for the dramatic action and newsworthy cutbacks.¹⁸⁸ The President had been placed in the position of either supporting the Defense Secretary he had just installed, or increasing the confusion in the Defense Department by countermanding the direction of the Secretary. Although Sullivan felt that the President did not want to cancel the carrier, Johnson had put him in a position where he could not reasonably object.¹⁸⁹ Sullivan's violent protest and resignation made him a hero with the Navy.

Admiral Denfeld had the same opportunity to go out in a blaze of glory over the cancellation of the carrier. He had been committed to the project and had opposed its termination. In September 1949 he wrote that "I fought for the big carrier from the day I took office until it was canceled and at no time did I give an inch in my fighting for it."¹⁹⁰ Now, the Navy's future was in doubt. Both Denfeld's staff and the departing Secretary recommended that the CNO support Sullivan's action by also resigning. But Denfeld "thought he would help the Navy better by staying" and remained at his post. Sullivan "always regretted that Denfeld didn't resign" and Vice Admiral Libby rightly concluded that Denfeld "would have been better off had he done so."¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, Denfeld's choice was difficult and courageous. He knew what he was fighting against and placed the good of his service ahead of his own personal concerns. Denfeld was not interested in the easy way out. At this juncture, the CNO probably saw himself as a modern day John Paul Jones, just beginning to fight while the masts tumbled down around his head. But Johnson and Denfeld's Air Force and Army opponents likely saw the CNO as a captain who had now chosen to go down with his sinking ship. The ongoing inter-service struggle was now clearly Denfeld's battle to win or lose.

¹⁸⁸Sullivan interview, p. 59.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁹⁰Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Hanson W. Baldwin, New York Times military correspondent, 7 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 2, File "Correspondence - B," Naval Historical Center.

¹⁹¹Sullivan interview, pp. 64 - 5, and Vice Admiral Libby interview, pp. 167 - 68.

Cancellation of the flush-deck carrier strained the relationship between Secretary Johnson and the President. David McCullough wrote that Truman liked Sullivan and "did not blame him for resigning." He also stated that "Johnson's manner troubled [Truman] greatly."¹⁹² Robert Donovan confirmed this assessment in his review of the Truman Administration, citing a diary entry of White House Assistant Press Secretary Eben Ayers which described the President as "very displeased" with Johnson.¹⁹³ Now that the President had chosen an aggressive man with a firm hand as his Defense Secretary, he seemed to miss Forrestal's thoughtful and deliberate manner.

The press responded vigorously to the cancellation of the United States and Sullivan's resignation. Two syndicated writers who were known for their support of the Navy's positions, the New York Times' Hanson W. Baldwin and U. S. News and World Report's David Lawrence, recognized that Johnson's action set a dangerous precedent by "allowing two services to pair off against the other" and believed that this would "lead to explosive events in the National Military Establishment."¹⁹⁴ The San Francisco Chronicle's editor observed that "the morale of the Navy was better the day after Pearl Harbor than it is today as a result of . . . the scuttling of the supercarrier."¹⁹⁵ Not all of the press reacted so negatively to this event, but there was clearly a sense that this battle was not over. More fireworks were yet to come.

¹⁹²McCullough, p. 741.

¹⁹³Robert J. Donovan, Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949 - 1953, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), p. 65.

¹⁹⁴David Lawrence, Washington Star, 25 April 1949 and Hanson W. Baldwin, New York Times, 29 April 1949, clippings in the Sullivan Papers, File "Clippings," Truman Library. Lawrence's columns against the Air Force and its B-36 bomber were syndicated in the Omaha World Herald, the local newspaper of Offutt Air Force Base, the home of General Curtis LeMay's Strategic Air Command. Lawrence's statements so infuriated LeMay that he sent several angry letters to the editor of the local paper. (Boettcher, p. 179). The writings of Baldwin, an officer in the naval reserve, were credited by Arthur Hadley as having "a chilling effect on efforts of President Truman . . . to unify the armed forces efficiently." (Hadley, p. 90).

¹⁹⁵"A Fighter Needed," San Francisco Chronicle, 28 April 1949.

Denfeld's view of the events surrounding the death of the carrier were understandably negative. He later questioned the right of Secretary Johnson to cancel the United States, but during his tenure as CNO, kept his charges within the Department and worked to improve the situation.¹⁹⁶ Admiral Radford, now serving as the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, wrote to Denfeld that the news from Washington was "certainly disturbing." He reported that "the cancellation of the CVX [flush-deck carrier] has had a tremendous and very bad effect on the Navy as a whole," and went on to observe that "our friend in the front office [Johnson] must be nuts. The only consoling thought I have is that he is going so far so fast that he is going to trip himself up."¹⁹⁷ This hopeful assessment was eventually to prove correct, but not before many more painful episodes in the unification war had to be endured.

Also with a view toward the future, the San Francisco Chronicle's editor wrote about the important decision now before Secretary Johnson and the President - the selection of Sullivan's replacement:

The obligation now rests heavily upon President Truman and Defense Secretary Johnson to produce a new Secretary of the Navy with the zeal and aggressiveness to give the Navy fair representation in the defense councils. . . . The situation calls for a prompt and intelligently selected replacement, and beyond that it demands that his views be given a fair reception by his superiors.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶In Admiral Denfeld's article about the cancellation of the carrier, published in Colliers' magazine in early 1950 following his removal, the ex-CNO stated that the cancellation "injected into our democratic process of representative government the application of dictatorial ukase. There was no authority to halt the building of a weapon decreed by experts to be necessary and authorized by Congress." ("The ONLY Carrier the Air Force Ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 46).

¹⁹⁷Letter from Admiral Radford to Admiral Denfeld, 18 May 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center.

¹⁹⁸"A Fighter Needed," San Francisco Chronicle, 28 April 1949.

The choice was indeed important, yet if the Navy had fallen totally out of the Administration's favor there was no reason to select a strong replacement for Sullivan. A figurehead Navy Secretary who would follow Johnson's lead could keep the Navy in a subordinate role. This was exactly the situation the Navy saw itself in when Secretary Johnson and President Truman selected Francis P. Matthews, a distinguished lawyer from Omaha, Nebraska, with no experience in naval affairs or national service, to lead the Navy.

Matthews was nearly unknown in Washington when Johnson chose him to join the Defense team in early May 1949. His most significant national-level service had been as the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus from 1939 through 1945. He had ably led this Catholic lay organization of 425,000 members in support of the war effort, even making two trips to European battlefields as a representative of the Catholic Bishops of America to assess the religious needs of the American servicemen.¹⁹⁹ His first trip was made on a British bomber, flying 12 hours over the North Atlantic in a temperature of 50 degrees below zero, demonstrating his firm commitment to do the job he was asked to perform.²⁰⁰ On his second visit to the war zone he traveled to the front in Italy in late 1944, actually coming under enemy fire on several occasions. After leaving Italy, he stopped in Greece and witnessed the beginnings of the Communist insurrection, being forced from his hotel by a grenade attack.²⁰¹ Matthews' courage and dedication were traits few were counting on as he entered into the Washington unification struggles.

The new Secretary had deep roots in Nebraska soil. He was born in Albion, Nebraska in 1887, the son of a harness maker. When Francis was nine years old his father

¹⁹⁹H. W. Becker, "St. Pat Was His Patron Saint," Dundee (Omaha, Nebraska) Sun, 11 March 1976, p. 15-A.

²⁰⁰Omaha World Herald, 20 February 1943, in the clipping files of the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰¹Omaha World Herald, 26 December 1944, in the clipping files of the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

died, leaving his mother to raise eight children on her own. In an initiative characteristic of the Matthews family, she used her husband's insurance money to purchase a farm and settled the family down to a regimen of hard work, discipline and faith in their God.²⁰² Eventually all eight children attended college and prospered. Francis scrubbed floors, waited tables, sold men's furnishings, and tutored his classmates to work his way through Omaha's Creighton University, earning his law degree in 1913. He excelled in school, winning the University's law prize three years in a row and graduating high in his class.²⁰³

After being admitted to the Nebraska bar in 1913, Matthews married and raised seven children of his own. He formed his own law firm in 1929 and pursued a career of community service typical of a prominent mid-Western businessman. The future Navy Secretary served on the local utilities board, rose to head the State's Knights of Columbus organization in 1924, became a member of Omaha's Chamber of Commerce, and served on the Board of Directors of Boy's Town.²⁰⁴ A devout Catholic, he was knighted by the Pope in 1924 for his services in the Knights of Columbus. Matthews did some government work in the 1930s, serving as Omaha's attorney for the Reconstruction Finance Commission. He also headed the Omaha Chamber of Commerce's military affairs committee in 1934, working with the local military bases of Fort Omaha and Fort Crook (later Offutt Air Force Base, the home of the Strategic Air Command). His business and legal ventures prospered, enabling him to become a millionaire in the early 1940s.

Matthews was an active Democrat in a predominantly Republican region. He chaired his county's Democratic Central Committee from 1932 through 1936 and was elected President of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce in 1938. His service in this

²⁰²Omaha World Herald, 8 February 1942, p. 7-C, in the clipping files of the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰³*Ibid.*, and Becker, "St. Pat Was His Patron Saint," p. 15-A.

²⁰⁴Omaha World Herald, 8 February 1942, p. 7-C, in the clipping files of the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews," and biographical sketch, "Francis P. Matthews," Truman Library.

position and on the bi-partisan Metropolitan Utilities Board earned him a reputation as a fair man to whom principles were more important than party politics.²⁰⁵ One disagreement over contract negotiations in 1943 did result in Matthews having been criticized by a local editor "as one who plays his politics, by preference, in the gutter."²⁰⁶ But this was the one exception in a long series of glowing testimonials found in his personal papers at the Truman Library and in the records of the Omaha World Herald, a Republican paper during this period.

By the end of World War II, Matthews had become involved in national affairs. When President Roosevelt died in 1945, Matthews issued a statement characterizing the Nation's loss as "tragic" and expressing "confidence in the ability of President Truman to carry on."²⁰⁷ In a speech one week later to the Concord Club of Massachusetts, Matthews supported a strong post-war defense posture: "We must preserve what we have if it takes the largest Army, Navy, and Air Force in the world."²⁰⁸ President Truman began to take note of this mid-Western leader in 1946, presenting him with the Medal of Merit for his war work, praising his "selfless and courageous and wholly objective contribution to the welfare of the Nation" in his citation.²⁰⁹

Truman selected Matthews as a member of his Commission on Civil Rights in 1947. The Nebraskan became convinced that the Nation's freedoms were not being equitably shared and made some powerful enemies in the South with his statements on

²⁰⁵Becker, "St. Pat Was His Patron Saint," p. 15-A, and various clippings from the Omaha World Herald between 1933 and 1945 in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰⁶Omaha World Herald, 19 March 1943, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰⁷Omaha World Herald, 15 April 1945, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰⁸Omaha World Herald, 20 April 1945, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁰⁹Biographical Sketch, "Francis P. Matthews," in the Archives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historian, File "Navy - 1949," Washington, D. C.

human rights. He also led the U. S. Chamber of Commerce's Committee on Socialism and Communism from 1946 through 1951. Matthews made sincere and powerful statements on communist influence in government, declaring Communism to be a "powerful and persuasive" force in America.²¹⁰ In probably his most significant political effort, he headed the Nebraska delegation to the 1948 Democratic National Convention and was credited with holding the group in Truman's camp despite the preferences of the State's Party Chairman for Senator Pepper of Florida.²¹¹ Matthews' experiences, although by no means high profile, did give him a limited familiarity with national affairs before Truman selected him as Secretary of the Navy in 1949.

The new Secretary of the Navy was also not ignorant of the battles for military unity being waged in the Nation's capital. In November 1946, he had presided at a dinner where then-Under Secretary Sullivan presented an award to National Catholic Community Service for its U.S.O. work. Sullivan joked about the progress of unification and the joys of serving in the military establishment.²¹² Matthews had also called Sullivan in 1947 to ask for help for a friend's nephew who was in trouble in the Navy. The conversation was polite and impersonal with Matthews seeming very unprepared and uncomfortable dealing with such an important government official.²¹³ In 1949, Matthews was aware of the Navy's problems and the difficult job he was accepting. Henry Doorly, the publisher of the Omaha World Herald, sent Matthews a congratulatory note on his nomination for the new position:

²¹⁰Omaha World Herald, miscellaneous clippings from 1945 through 1947, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²¹¹Omaha World Herald, 29 June 1948 and 13 May 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²¹²Omaha World Herald, 18 November 1946, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²¹³Transcript of telephone conversation between Matthews and Under Secretary Sullivan, 26 March 1947, in the Sullivan Papers, Box 8, Under Secretary Sullivan's appointment calendar, Truman Library.

My hearty good wishes to you in your new job as Secretary of the Navy. I don't know why you want it, or why you would take it, but if you do, God bless you, and I hope you enjoy it. I congratulate Truman more than I do you.²¹⁴

Francis Matthews went into his new assignment with his eyes open.

When the announcement was made that Matthews was to be the new Secretary of the Navy, those who knew him were effusive in their praise. Omaha's Catholic Archbishop G. T. Bergen wrote President Truman, declaring that "you can trust him [Matthews] absolutely, and I am certain there will be no regrets on the part of anyone over his selection."²¹⁵ J. Francis McDermott, a prominent Nebraska Republican and former Commander of the State's American Legion, also praised Matthews' selection in the Omaha World Herald, doubting "if there is another man in the United States with the moral, professional, and business qualifications of Mr. Matthews." He went on to predict that "while alert to protect the proper interests of the Navy he will be scrupulously fair to the Air Force and the Army."²¹⁶ Admiral Radford wrote to Admiral Denfeld that although he did not know Matthews, the Navy's "head Catholic," Father Maurice Sheehy "gave him a good mark."²¹⁷ Sheehy, who was to play a prominent role in the events surrounding Denfeld's removal later in the year, had served as a Navy chaplain during the war and was currently the head of religious education at the Catholic University in Washington. He maintained a good friendship with all the Navy's leaders, both in uniform and mufti.

²¹⁴Letter from Henry Doorly to Matthews, 14 May 1949, in Matthews Papers, Correspondence files, File "D," Truman Library.

²¹⁵Letter from Archbishop G. T. Bergen to President Truman, 20 May 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Official Files, File "Navy Correspondence 1949," Truman Library.

²¹⁶J. Francis McDermott quoted in "McDermott Has Praise for Matthews' Service," Omaha World Herald, 13 May 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²¹⁷Letter from Admiral Radford to Admiral Denfeld, 18 May 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center.

There was speculation concerning why Matthews, from land-locked Nebraska, was the President's choice to lead the sea services. The most credible opinion is that of Secretary Sullivan, who felt that Johnson, having just lost an Irish-Catholic Navy Secretary, sought to placate the Catholic voters whom he might depend on in 1952 by choosing another prominent Catholic to fill the position.²¹⁸ Although there were other Nebraskans in the top ranks of the Pentagon, they were all Army officers.²¹⁹ The most damaging observation made in this connection was Matthews' own statement in a news conference that the largest waterborne craft he had ever been in was a rowboat.²²⁰ To his chagrin, the new Secretary quickly picked up the nickname "Rowboat Matthews." The Navy's uniformed leaders were hesitant to place their trust in a man with no naval experience, especially since he was the hated Johnson's choice for the position.

Matthews accepted the job not because of its prestige or for any potential personal gain, but with a legitimate desire to serve his Country in any way the President asked. Contrary to popular accusations, Matthews had not been a heavy contributor to Truman's campaign and had not even met Louis Johnson before he assumed his new position.²²¹ His confirmation hearings were smooth, the only opposition to his nomination coming from Southern Senators who objected to his earlier efforts in the President's Civil Rights Commission and from liberals who brought up his staunch anti-Communist

²¹⁸Sullivan interview, p. 73.

²¹⁹Lt. Gen. Wedemeyer, the Deputy Army Chief, Maj. Gen. Gruenther, the Director of the Joint Staff, and Maj. Gen. Pick, Chief of the Army's Corps of Engineers were mentioned as prominent military Nebraskans in the Omaha World Herald article of 16 May 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²²⁰Ralph Smith, "Navy Secretary Nominee Well Known for Public Service," Omaha World Herald, 13 May 1949.

²²¹John A. Giles, "The Navy's Secretary Walks Alone," Washington Star, 23 October 1949, p. C-1.

pronouncements for the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. Even with these objections, he was confirmed unanimously by the Senate on 18 May 1949.²²²

History's depiction of Secretary Matthews is evolving based on recent research. Paul Hammond's 1963 article on the controversy portrays the "soft-spoken lawyer from Omaha" as "a Johnson man" who was ineffective in the Pentagon.²²³ Paolo Coletta describes Matthews as "another Democratic party fund-raiser . . . [and a] friend of the defense secretary" in his articles on Matthews and Denfeld.²²⁴ E. B. Potter, one of the Country's foremost naval writers, stated that Matthews was "less a Navy advocate than Johnson's loyal lackey."²²⁵ General Bradley's memoirs give a more charitable view of the Secretary: "He was a sincere, devout and decent man who could not have taken over the Navy at a worse time."²²⁶ But Michael Isenberg's 1993 history of the U. S. Navy in the Cold War continues the denigration of Matthews. His only characterization of the Secretary portrays him as "a man of such cartoonish demeanor that he once sent part of the nation's secret war plans to the cleaners in his jacket pocket."²²⁷ Isenberg provides no documentation for this incident or his characterization of the man.

Recent scholarly efforts should improve the Secretary's reputation. Jeffrey Barlow's The Revolt of the Admirals credits Matthews with being "a cautious and astute lawyer," and depicts his role in the "revolt" as that of an intelligent and dedicated public

²²²Omaha World Herald, 19 May 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²²³Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 507.

²²⁴Paolo E. Coletta, American Secretaries of the Navy, Vol. II, 1913 - 1972, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980) and Coletta's essay titled "Louis Emil Denfeld," in Robert W. Love, Jr.'s The Chiefs of Naval Operations, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980), pp. 192 - 206. Coletta's portrait of Matthews in his collection of biographical sketches of the Secretaries of the Navy is the only dedicated scholarly work published on Matthews. It is regrettably shallow and provides an inaccurate impression of Francis Matthews.

²²⁵E. B. Potter, Admiral Arleigh Burke, (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 320.

²²⁶Bradley and Blair, p. 502.

²²⁷Isenberg, p. 162.

servant.²²⁸ Barlow's view is much more consonant with the impression this writer gained from a review of the Matthews Papers and other primary sources. The older historical treatments all seem to have been biased by the two major events of Matthews' term of service, the "revolt" and the outbreak of the Korean War. These occurrences certainly should continue to tarnish his credentials as a successful Secretary of the Navy, but give no grounds for attempts to fault his character or intelligence.

Just before heading to Washington to assume his new responsibilities, Matthews told an interviewer that his task would be "to see that the Navy co-operates with the other divisions of the armed forces to accomplish the very obvious desire of the American people [unification]." He also professed a full awareness of the "sublime traditions of the Navy," and contended that unification could be achieved without sacrificing the Navy's proud heritage. Matthews echoed Johnson's views when he stated that he planned to pursue economy in government "to the greatest degree that it can be accomplished," and he agreed with the President in assessing that war was not "probable in the near future."²²⁹ Possessing this focused approach, Francis Matthews was sworn in as Secretary of the Navy on 25 May 1949. Despite his clarity of purpose and commitment to his duties, Matthews demonstrated how much he still had to learn about Washington when he became lost in the Pentagon on the way to his swearing-in ceremony.²³⁰

Admiral Denfeld spoke positively about Secretary Matthews' selection as his new boss, and promptly sent a congratulatory letter to the nominee:

²²⁸Barlow, p. 272.

²²⁹Ralph Smith, "Navy Secretary Nominee Well Known for Public Service," Omaha World Herald, 13 May 1949, Transcript of Matthews' interview on "Meet the Press," 28 January 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Speeches," Truman Library.

²³⁰Omaha World Herald, 25 May 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

I am happy to know you will soon be our next Secretary. . . . I am certain that we will enjoy the close associations that we will soon have and you may rest assured that, we in the Navy, will support you completely and wholeheartedly.²³¹

The CNO also mentioned their mutual friend, Father Sheehy, and noted that he had spoken well of the Secretary-nominee. Admiral Denfeld needed to cultivate a good relationship with Matthews. Given Denfeld's intention to help the Navy out of its current predicament and his recognition that the danger came from the civilian leadership of the Defense Department, he hoped Matthews would help convince Johnson that dissatisfaction in the Navy was not confined to old admirals opposed to unification. If Matthews lacked an understanding of naval matters, it would fall to Denfeld and his staff to provide him with the information he needed to assess the situation intelligently and convince the President and Congress of the national need for a strong Navy.

The first few months of Matthews' term were generally harmonious. The new Secretary delivered the commencement address at Annapolis on 2 June 1949, telling the graduating Midshipmen that "the Navy has become for me the highest obligation in life" and that the American people continued to recognize "the fundamental necessity for American superiority on the seven seas."²³² The Naval Academy Alumni Association's magazine, Shipmate, quoted Matthews as having stated that "the slogan for all Americans today and from this day forward must be: one for all and all for one."²³³ The new Secretary was doing his best to reduce the Navy's tensions about unification. More concretely during June 1949, he and Admiral Denfeld fought for the Navy's position on

²³¹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Matthews, 13 May 1949, in Matthews Papers, Correspondence files, File "D," Truman Library.

²³²Omaha World Herald, 3 June 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²³³"Text of Secretary Matthews' Commencement Address," Shipmate, June - July 1949, p. 19.

modifications to two Essex class aircraft carriers and convinced Johnson that these improvements were needed.

Omaha expressed its pride in the Secretary by declaring 13 June 1949 to be "Francis P. Matthews Day." Admiral Denfeld was to be in town to serve as the graduation speaker at Boys' Town, and because the Secretary was a member of the Boys' Town Board, this occasion served well to get the two leaders of the Navy together. The celebration took on a very conciliatory inter-service flavor when the local Strategic Air Command staged a fly-over where its planes dipped their wings in salute to the Navy's leadership.²³⁴ Despite a heavy rain, the day of unity went off well.

Denfeld and Matthews seemed to make a good team, and relations between the services appeared to be on the mend. The new Secretary of the Navy was very impressed with Johnson and President Truman and also with the men in the Navy and Marine Corps.²³⁵ During his first two months on the job, Matthews developed a great deal of respect for the admirals. In a 29 July 1949 interview, he asserted that there was no other group of Americans "among whom the average of ability, personality, integrity and education is higher than it is among the high-ranking officers of the Navy."²³⁶ But the improved cooperation and harmony Matthews had observed within the defense establishment was only surface deep. Within the same week, he said that "the three service secretaries are in perfect mutual understanding," and that "the Air Force was

²³⁴Omaha World Herald, 8 June 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²³⁵An Omaha World Herald article of 29 July 1949 quoted Matthews describing Johnson as "one of the ablest men in public life." Rear Admiral Dennison, Truman's Naval Aide, recalled that Matthews "stood in absolute awe of the President." Interview with Robert L. Dennison, Admiral, USN (Ret.) by John T. Mason, 1972 - 73, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1975, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections.

²³⁶Omaha World Herald, 29 July 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

unbalanced in favor of strategic bombing."²³⁷ The fundamental disagreements between the services could not be glossed over or repaired simply by changing civilian leaders.

²³⁷Ibid., and Letter from Secretary Matthews to Congressman Vinson, 20 July 1949, quoted in Robert F. Futrell, Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 - 1960, (Montgomery, Alabama: Air University Press, 1989), p. 251.

ADMIRAL DENFELD ON THE DEFENSIVE (JUNE - OCTOBER 1949)

"As you can well appreciate, it is going to be tough sledding for the Navy from now on and all I can do is to fight in an effort to save as much as I can." (1949 - Admiral Denfeld)²³⁸

I am so weary of this inter-service struggle for position, prestige and power that this morning I practically "blew my top." . . . I've seriously considered resigning my commission, so that I could say what I pleased publicly. (1949 - General Eisenhower)²³⁹

Denfeld, ever the optimist, consistently sought to establish a good working relationship with the Navy's civilian leaders and the other services and to resolve their differences through discussion and compromise. Captain Arleigh Burke, then an officer on Denfeld's staff and later one of the Navy's best CNOs, observed that while Admiral Radford and the senior aviators were "very concerned," Matthews' and Denfeld's offices "were more sanguine. . . . They did not want to rock the boat. . . . They were still reluctant to emphasize the views of the Navy and did not, at first, place the unification controversy high enough on the priority list of Navy problems."²⁴⁰ Vice Admiral Wellborne, DCNO for Administration under Denfeld, agreed with Burke in thinking that Denfeld "had hoped for quite a long while that the matter could be resolved in an amicable way without actual confrontation."²⁴¹

²³⁸Letter from Admiral Denfeld to columnist Hanson W. Baldwin, 7 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 2, File "Correspondence - B," Naval Historical Center.

²³⁹Letter from General Eisenhower to General H. Arnold, 14 March 1949, quoted in Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower. Volume One, Soldier, General of the Army, President-elect, 1890 - 1952, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 487.

²⁴⁰Burke interview, pp. 155 - 56.

²⁴¹Interview with Charles Wellborn, Vice Admiral, USN (Ret.), by John T. Mason, 1971 - 72, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1972, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections, p. 289.

The Admiral took his hopes into the JCS sessions of mid-1949, but the continuing budgetary pressures and the passions unleashed by the cancellation of the United States were still the distinguishing features of the period. Denfeld continued to criticize the Air Force's belief in the omnipotence of strategic bombing, contending that no such claim could be made, at least not until the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the Soviet air defense system were better understood. A report by the Joint Intelligence Committee on 3 March 1949, appeared to confirm most of Denfeld's misgivings concerning the lack of reliable intelligence data.²⁴² The Admiral also continued to encourage JCS planning for the defense of Western Europe and the Mediterranean following a Soviet attack rather than placing total reliance on an atomic counter-offensive. He pointed out that the use of the atomic bomb might not be authorized by the President, that allies like France and Great Britain might not approve the use of their territory to launch atomic strikes while they were within the range of Soviet retaliatory strikes, and that the B-36 was not capable of getting the job done.²⁴³ Denfeld also correctly observed that the spirit of the JCS was wrong, noting that "we have been meeting as Service Chiefs, not as Joint Chiefs of Staff."²⁴⁴ Despite the logic in these arguments and observations, the other representatives were not interested in compromise. Their views had been validated by Johnson's cancellation of the carrier earlier in the year. Strategic airpower was in favor, and the Navy's budget was going to be cut to pay for it.

The fact that the other Chiefs acted like vultures circling a dying animal frustrated Denfeld to no end. Johnson ordered deep cuts in the supporting civilian manpower of the services and insisted that the Navy make more than half of all reductions. Negotiations for

²⁴²Rearden, p. 404.

²⁴³"Memorandum by the Chief of Naval Operations," undated but, based on content, written between May and August 1949, in Symington Papers, File "Navy Department," Truman Library.

²⁴⁴Ibid.

the fiscal year 1951 defense budget were in their final stages with the Navy's share falling to third place for the first time.²⁴⁵ The Army and the Air Force proposed even more dramatic cuts in the Navy and Marine Corps, including doing away with the Marines' air capabilities and cutting the number of active fleet aircraft carriers from eight to four (Army) or zero (Air Force).²⁴⁶ Denfeld thought that the final numbers "were picked out of a hat."²⁴⁷ Vice Admiral Wellborne observed that the CNO

felt that his advice was not being accepted at . . . full value . . . in the councils of the Joint Chiefs and his reaction to this whole disagreement was one of . . . frustration. . . . He simply was very unhappy about the situation as it existed.²⁴⁸

Admiral Denfeld was in a losing position. Even if he convinced his new Secretary to support the Navy's position, he would still be consistently outvoted in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and had no influence with the Secretary of Defense.

Compounding Denfeld's difficulties, the DCNO noted that there were problems of "envy and distrust" developing between Denfeld and the other officers in the Navy due to his apparent good relations with the NME's civilian leaders.²⁴⁹ Some historical accounts of this period have asserted that this disenchantment within the Navy was a significant contributing factor in his eventual replacement.²⁵⁰ Burke confirmed the presence of internal tensions but understood that Denfeld was only trying to follow orders to the best

²⁴⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 490.

²⁴⁶Kenneth W. Condit, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume II, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947-1949, (Washington: The Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1978), p. 254.

²⁴⁷Johnson's proposed FY-1951 budget authorized only four active carriers. Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 47.

²⁴⁸Wellborne interview, p. 287.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰Mark Perry, Four Stars, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), p. 19.

of his ability and striving to promote improved relations.²⁵¹ What was actually occurring was Denfeld's increasing isolation from both his superiors and subordinates.

The economy program of Secretary Johnson and President Truman squeezed all the armed services. Edward Kolodziej concluded that "each of the services was approaching a breaking point where any additional budgetary restrictions would threaten its very survival as a viable military instrument."²⁵² In reducing the defense budget from \$45 billion to \$11 billion in three years, the President had helped the economy in the short term and balanced the budget, but the cuts being made in 1949 were clearly coming at the cost of actual readiness and capabilities. Johnson's report to the President at the end of 1949 stated that "the economy program of the Department of Defense aims at achieving a maximum of national security at a minimum cost. Our watchword is and must be economy in every activity."²⁵³ Given the fact that there existed no agreed upon national security strategy at the time, the ability of the armed services to provide what Johnson defined as "national security" was highly debatable.

Admiral Denfeld, as the most consistent critic of the economy program, fell further out of favor. General Bradley, as Army Chief of Staff and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported the Secretary in his efforts to save money. He thereby retained his influence in the Joint Chiefs of Staff but cost his service and the Nation dearly. Thirty-four years later he remarked that

from this distance, I must say that this decision was a mistake, perhaps the greatest of Truman's presidency. My support of his decision . . . was likewise

²⁵¹Burke interview, p. 531.

²⁵²Edward A. Kolodziej, The Uncommon Defense and Congress, 1945 - 1963, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. 95.

²⁵³Louis A. Johnson, Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense, July 1 to Dec 31, 1949, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 6.

a mistake, perhaps the greatest mistake I made in my postwar years in Washington.²⁵⁴

Admiral Denfeld rarely criticized the economy program in general but rather vocally opposed its implementation. He objected to the "practice of the Secretary of Defense and the JCS in telling each service what it could do with its money," not the overall limits.²⁵⁵ A good example of this distinction was the case of the U. S. S. United States. The Navy had previously reprioritized within its budget to continue the carrier program by canceling other funded construction projects. This flexibility allowed the service's leaders to prioritize their own programs, an ability Johnson had firmly removed with the cancellation of the carrier.

In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on 18 June, the CNO highlighted the Navy's weaknesses in aircraft procurement, modernization programs for the active fleet, electronics development programs, and maintenance of the reserve fleet under the fiscal year 1950 budget which was soon to go into effect.²⁵⁶ He pointed out that the Navy was receiving delivery of "far fewer" aircraft in 1949 than "at the time Pearl Harbor was attacked," and that combat ships were manned "at about 67% of war complement."²⁵⁷ He concluded his statement by stating that "the Navy will discharge its responsibilities throughout the coming year to the utmost of our ability, but not without a considerable degree of risk."²⁵⁸ This was as close as he could come to opposing the President's budget under the Defense Department's rules on public statements.

²⁵⁴Bradley and Blair, p. 487.

²⁵⁵Denfeld, "The Nation NEEDS the Navy," Collier's, 1 April 1950, p. 44.

²⁵⁶Denfeld, Statement to the Armed Services Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, on the Navy Budget for Fiscal Year 1950, 18 June 1949, pp. 10 - 12, in the White House Official Files, File "Department of the Navy Correspondence - 1949," Truman Library.

²⁵⁷Ibid., p. 7, and Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 47.

²⁵⁸Ibid., p. 12.

The entire defense budgetary process from 1945 through 1950 was inherently flawed. The absence of a strategic plan to prioritize force structure decisions and President Truman's philosophy of allocating defense funds based on arbitrary ceilings rather than actual needs caused the military establishment to atrophy and forced the Service Chiefs to compete for every dollar. The CNO understood this problem but was unable to develop a solution or convince anyone else to do so. Admiral Denfeld, an adequate, but by no means brilliant strategist, did not have the influence to make a difference.

Congress also deserves a share of the blame for this budgetary arrangement as Edward Kolodziej points out in The Uncommon Defense and Congress, 1945 - 1963:

[Congress] interested itself essentially in the *how*, and not the *why*, of military spending. Largely ignored were the many interacting and seemingly intractable relations between the nation's actual and potential military power, and, correspondingly, its subtly shaded spectrum of foreign policy goals that, to be supported, required different kinds of military power for varying political contingencies.²⁵⁹

Kolodziej concluded that only two things could break the cycle of defense reductions and internal competition - war or forward, strategic thinking, noting that Korea ultimately came first.

Each service's publicity machine continued to attempt to persuade Congress and the public that its service needed a greater budgetary priority. Thomas Boettcher noted that "during the summer of 1949, the Navy League and the Air Force Association each appropriated \$500,000 for promotion campaigns to support their favored service."²⁶⁰ Secretary Matthews continued to try to downplay the dissension: "I can find no evidence

²⁵⁹Kolodziej, p. 36.

²⁶⁰Boettcher, p. 179.

among my associates in the top ranks of the three services of a spirit to do anything but work for our country first, rather than for any single department of the military establishment."²⁶¹ Nevertheless, the attacks continued. Secretary Symington, in a private letter to Ferdinand Eberstadt, a member of the Hoover Commission assessing the Executive Branch's organization, complained that "action must be taken to resolve the present conflict resulting from the Navy's continuous attacks." He went on to state that "unless somebody can stop these attacks . . . efficient functioning of the military establishment is impossible; therefore the security of our country is seriously jeopardized."²⁶² Not surprisingly, this private letter was leaked to the press. There seemed to be no end to the infighting.

The Hoover Commission's charter was to examine the "operation and organization of the executive functions and activities" in response to Secretary Forrestal's early 1949 recommendations for greater centralization in the Military Establishment and concerns expressed by other cabinet members. Its membership included former President Hoover, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal (until early 1949), and Joseph P. Kennedy.²⁶³ Its study, completed just as Johnson took over, delved into the procedures of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and found that the Chiefs, "like the rest of the National Military Establishment, are not firmly under civilian control." The "divided loyalties" of the JCS members were also highlighted as was the Commission's assessment that each Chief "will tend to answer much more to the service secretary who is his direct superior than to the single policies of a unified Establishment." The Commission concluded that "under these circumstances

²⁶¹Letter from Secretary Matthews to Judge Frank E. Day of Oregon, 10 June 1949, in Matthews Papers, File "Correspondence - D," Truman Library.

²⁶²Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 489.

²⁶³Chairman, Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government, The National Security Organization, (The Hoover Commission Report), H. Doc. No. 86, 81st Cong., 1st sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), p. 1.

centralized civilian control scarcely exists," a fact that was patently obvious to Forrestal.²⁶⁴

Given the clear-cut results of this study, Congress rapidly processed an amendment to the National Security Act to give the Secretary of Defense much greater control over his subordinates. Johnson touted the legislation as a means of preventing the sort of frustration that might drive future Defense Secretaries to suicide and thereby transformed the bill into a personal memorial to Forrestal. At the time of the carrier cancellation, the Senate had already passed its version of the new National Security Act. A brief attempt to delay the House's consideration of the Bill was proposed due to the outcry over Johnson's abrupt action, but, given the popular and Congressional sentiment generated by Forrestal's suicide, there was no stopping this initiative.²⁶⁵ On 10 August the National Security Act of 1949 was signed into law, providing Johnson with just the authority he needed to implement fully his concept of defense unification.

The new National Security Act officially changed the title of the military department from the NME to the Defense Department, a term that was already in common usage. The Act removed the Service Secretaries from the National Security Council and left the Secretary of Defense as the sole spokesman for the armed services. Another change which significantly affected Admiral Denfeld was the creation of the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), thereby raising the body's membership from three to four. When Secretary Johnson elevated General Bradley from Army Chief of Staff to CJCS and replaced him with General J. Lawton Collins, the CNO found himself outnumbered three-to-one in the JCS. His difficult position had now become nearly impossible.

²⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 7 and 11.

²⁶⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 501.

Regardless of these difficulties, Denfeld was committed to continuing his fight for improvements in national security and for the Navy. He had now completed, some would say endured, most of his two-year term as CNO and was willing to continue for another term. As early as May 1949, Admiral Radford had urged him to "get your extension nailed down" to enable the CNO to make some personnel moves and eliminate some of the dissension in the service.²⁶⁶ Because Denfeld's initial assignment as CNO was due to expire in December and Secretary Johnson normally desired a three month turnover process between his JCS members and their reliefs, Secretary Matthews needed to make a decision on Denfeld's reappointment by early September.²⁶⁷ On this very important choice, Secretary Matthews made his wishes known well ahead of the deadline.

Admiral Denfeld and the Secretary of the Navy had remained on good terms during the first months of Matthews' service. In statements made in Omaha on "Matthews Day" in June, Denfeld praised his boss as "one of the ablest people we've had in public office in some time," and as a man "of integrity . . . and unquestioned patriotism." These sentiments were reciprocated by Matthews.²⁶⁸ In July the two presented a united front before Congress, testifying in opposition to the President's proposed budget and additional cuts introduced in the House.²⁶⁹ Although they were fighting an uphill battle, it seemed that Matthews and Denfeld made a good team and were comfortable with each other.

²⁶⁶Letter from Radford to Denfeld, 18 May 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center. The letter was particularly focused on Radford's annoyance with Admiral Blandy, the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, who Radford wanted Denfeld to "send to the showers."

²⁶⁷Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," Collier's, 18 March 1950, p. 15.

²⁶⁸"Unification Plan Gaining, Matthews, Denfeld Report Here," Omaha World Herald, 11 June 1949, and "Honor is Paid to Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 14 June 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁶⁹Their unity was noted in "Matthews and Denfeld," D. C. Times Herald, 8 July 1949, in Matthews Papers, File "Miscellaneous Clippings," Truman Library.

Despite this harmony between the two Navy leaders, rumors had circulated early in 1949 that Denfeld was to be fired.²⁷⁰ The Admiral was aware that some persons inside and outside the Navy were unhappy with his performance and point of view, but he felt confident that at least the President held him in high regard. Later he wrote that "several people told me the President was very much pleased with my selection and had said I was the best CNO the Navy had had since he had been in Washington."²⁷¹ Even Secretary Johnson said good things about his CNO:

May I say that since I have been in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Admiral Denfeld has done an outstanding service and has rendered loyal support to the program I am endeavoring to carry out as laid down by the Congress.²⁷²

Sensing that his superiors were satisfied in his performance and knowing that he still had much work to do, Denfeld let it be known that he would accept a nomination for an additional two-year term. Because the National Security Act limited JCS members to a maximum tenure of four years except in wartime, one two-year extension was all that Denfeld could expect.

Matthews submitted his recommendation to reappoint Admiral Denfeld on 12 July 1949 and enthusiastically endorsed his subordinate:

[He] has worked with me in fullest harmony and cooperation from the day I was honored with this office. His experience as Chief of Naval Operations, coupled with his outstanding administrative abilities, makes him most valuable to me, the Navy, and the National Defense Establishment. The wisdom of his reappointment is emphasized by the importance of the continuity of the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, of which Admiral Denfeld is the senior

²⁷⁰Barlow, p. 269, quoting a member of Denfeld's staff.

²⁷¹Denfeld, "Why I was Fired," *Collier's*, 18 March 1950, p. 15.

²⁷²Letter from Secretary Johnson to Edward C. Holden, a New York American Legion official, 27 July 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Correspondence - H," Naval Historical Center.

member, in dealing with the numerous long range problems with which that body has been laboring.²⁷³

Matthews had served only 47 days as Secretary of the Navy when he forwarded this recommendation to Secretary Johnson. Although the Washington neophyte Matthews was certainly impressed by Denfeld, a 40 year Navy veteran who had spent most of the last 15 years in the Washington corridors of power, an authentic mutual respect had already developed between himself and Denfeld over this short period. This appreciation of their shared values and goals was to last through even the darkest days of 1949. Matthews' renomination of Denfeld was a very conscious decision.

Johnson considered Matthews' letter for over three weeks before forwarding it to the President on 2 August 1949 with the following brief endorsement: "I concur in this nomination."²⁷⁴ Truman took less time to evaluate the recommendation and sent it to the Senate for confirmation on 11 August 1949 with his blessing. In his news conference the same day he announced that he had appointed General Bradley as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and had appointed Admiral Denfeld to another two-year term as CNO beginning on 15 December.²⁷⁵ Hanson W. Baldwin, the New York Times' military correspondent sent a telegram to the Denfelds with his "congratulations, but also condolence" and his "hope" that "the next two years [would be] easier."²⁷⁶ Despite Baldwin's hope, Denfeld's Senate confirmation was practically the only event in 1949 that went easily for the CNO. On the 15th the Senate completed its consideration of his reappointment and approved his second term.

²⁷³Letter from Matthews to President Truman, 12 July 1949, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

²⁷⁴Memorandum from Johnson to President Truman, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Official Files, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

²⁷⁵Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1949, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 419.

²⁷⁶Telegram from Hanson W. Baldwin to Admiral Denfeld, 12 August 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 2, File "Correspondence - B," Naval Historical Center.

Some of the more radical Navy partisans imagined there must have been some sort of secret agreement behind Denfeld's reappointment. Rumors circulated in the press and in naval circles that Denfeld had secured his extension by agreeing to support Matthews and Johnson in the destruction of the Navy and the Marine Corps.²⁷⁷ Denfeld objected strongly to these anonymous accusations as he explained to his friend Hanson W. Baldwin of the New York Times:

I want you to know that I did not seek reappointment and that I have made no commitments conditioned on such a reappointment. I want you to further know that when I find that I can be of no further use to the Navy, I will be the first one to get out.²⁷⁸

The Admiral received the signed official commission for his second term in mid-September from Rear Admiral Dennison, Truman's Naval Aide and a close friend of Denfeld's. The CNO later reported that "shortly after I got it, I called on Secretary Matthews to thank him for the commission. . . . 'There's nothing I have done since I have been Secretary,' he [Matthews] said, 'that has given me more pleasure than getting you reappointed.'"²⁷⁹ The Navy's leadership appeared ready to move in a positive direction and put some of their disagreements behind them.

Probably the most pressing weapons procurement issue facing the Department of Defense in 1949 after the cancellation of the "supercarrier" was the acquisition of the Air Force's giant strategic bomber, the B-36. This decision involved the dedication of hundreds of millions of scarce defense dollars for the purchase of enough B-36s to carry out the atomic retaliatory strikes projected by the JCS in the event of war. Denfeld had

²⁷⁷See New York Times, 14 September 1949, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 507.

²⁷⁸Letter from Denfeld to Hanson W. Baldwin, 7 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 2, File "Correspondence - B," Naval Historical Center.

²⁷⁹Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," Collier's, 18 March 1950, p. 15.

gone on record in JCS meetings and in Congressional testimony opposing "excessive reliance" on strategic bombing, and he continued to oppose procurement of the B-36 in quantity until its performance had been fully evaluated and the Russian air defensive capabilities were better understood. But as a JCS member, he was tied to the corporate position. When he lost a private vote he normally signed up to the majority opinion, at least in public statements designed to give the impression of unity.²⁸⁰

Such was the case when a 1949 Congressional investigation sought to evaluate the JCS' logic in committing the Armed Forces to follow a strategic bombing strategy in the event of global war. In an effort to keep the investigation from delving into classified plans and information, Admiral Denfeld signed a JCS statement to Congress which was characterized as "a ringing endorsement of the strategic concept in the current war plan."²⁸¹ The CNO's subordinates perceived his endorsement of this agreement to be a betrayal of the Navy's interests and became even more disenchanted with his leadership. Denfeld, for his part, continued to believe firmly in the futility of the strategic bombing plans as he explained after he was fired later in the year.

Suppose we do manage to transport concentrated explosives in \$5,000,000 airplanes across the polar icecap. We can't win a war by terror. The Russians die readily, but they don't scare readily. To defeat the Soviet Union, if it brings war on us, we shall have to overcome the will of the Russian people - to convince them that they would be better off in a world where our ideas prevail than in one ruled by the Kremlin philosophy. We shall not do that merely by obliterating their chief cities and killing their people. Nor can we protect our friends in Europe solely by dropping bombs, no matter how awful their effect.²⁸²

²⁸⁰Arthur A. Ageton, Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.), "The Joint Chiefs of Staff," Shipmate, July 1951, p. 3ff provides a good overview of JCS operations and the process used when there were dissenting views.

²⁸¹Condit, pp. 326 - 27.

²⁸²Denfeld, "The Nation NEEDS the Navy," Collier's, 1 April 1950, p. 37.

Meanwhile, as Denfeld proved unable to articulate his objections to the existing plans, the Air Force ordered hundreds of B-36 bombers. The B-36 was the world's largest bomber in 1949. It weighed over 278,000 lbs., was 163 feet long, and had a wingspan of 230 feet. It was designed to fly 10,000 miles carrying 10,000 lbs. of bombs, the weight of an atomic bomb in the late 1940s.²⁸³ The B-36 was driven by the unusual arrangement of six "pusher-type, propeller-driven engines," which appear to the untrained observer to be mounted backwards.²⁸⁴ The original design specifications for the bomber had been developed in 1940 when it seemed possible that Hitler would gain control of all of Europe and that eventually the United States would have to fight Germany at intercontinental ranges. Because the eventual war was fought under different conditions, priorities were shifted to shorter-range bombers, and the B-36 design sat on a shelf.

After the war the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation completed the design contract and by 1948 had a B-36 ready for its initial testing. The Air Force held a public competition to name the new, giant bomber and, instead of martial-sounding submissions like "Conqueror" and "Earthshaker," the name "Peacemaker" was selected.²⁸⁵ The Navy found this name more than slightly ironic, since the "Peacemaker" became a central figure in the budget and mission battles between the services. The huge aircraft acquired several unofficial nicknames during its ten-year career, including "Magnesium Monster," "Aluminum Overcast," "Flying Apartment House," and "Ramp Rooster," the latter due to

²⁸³Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 486. The best source of detailed technical and historical design information on the B-36 is a series of articles by Meyers Jacobsen in the American Aviation Historical Society Journal between 1970 and 1974.

²⁸⁴Gregory S. Byard, Technical Sergeant, USAF, "7th Bombardment Wing - B-36 Chronology," unpublished manuscript, 1959, USSTRATCOM Archives, "B-36 File," Bellevue, Nebraska.

²⁸⁵Meyers K. Jacobsen, "Names and the B-36," American Aviation Historical Society Journal, Fall 1971, pp. 186-188. Another good overview of the development of the B-36 can be found in Kenneth L. Moll, "Nuclear Strategy, 1945 - 1949: America's First Four Years," Master's thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1965, pp. 146 - 50.

early maintenance problems.²⁸⁶ Regardless of its name, the B-36 became the standard bearer of the Air Force's strategic bombing strategy and a magnet for intense Navy criticism in 1949.

The 7th Bomb Wing at Carswell Air Force Base near Fort Worth, Texas was the first Air Force unit to operate the B-36 after taking delivery of its first one in June 1948. By the spring of 1949 this Wing had grown to 36 operational bombers. Secretary Forrestal approved the initial orders for B-36s, and due to Johnson's business connections with Consolidated Vultee, was asked to finalize the decision on the purchase of auxiliary jet engines for the aircraft before the new Secretary took over to avoid any perceived impropriety.²⁸⁷ Johnson resigned his position as a director of the aircraft manufacturing company before assuming his new duties, but he recognized his vulnerability to charges of conflict of interest. The Air Force, with the approval of the JCS and both Secretaries of Defense, placed orders for a total of 170 B-36s in 1949 at a cost of \$5.8 million each - a commitment of nearly \$1 billion.²⁸⁸

Naval aviators, still smarting from the cancellation of their new carrier, saw this vast outlay as a bad investment and raised such a storm about the B-36's vulnerability to their fighters that Congress presented Secretary Johnson with a resolution requesting a public test between the new bomber and the Navy's best fighter, the Banshee.²⁸⁹ Admiral Denfeld and the other members of the JCS evaluated this request on 27 May 1949 but rejected the proposal, noting that secret aircraft performance data would then be available to both the public and the Russians. Although Denfeld supported a classified test to assess

²⁸⁶Ibid.

²⁸⁷Millis, p. 551.

²⁸⁸Moll, p. 200, and Denfeld, "The Nation NEEDS the Navy," *Collier's*, 1 April 1950, p. 42.

²⁸⁹U. S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Unification and Strategy*, H. Doc. 600, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 7.

the vulnerability of the B-36 to enemy fighter defenses, this position was never publicized and the CNO's reputation as "the Quisling of the Navy" was strengthened.²⁹⁰

The B-36 survived the Navy's criticism and served as the Air Force's primary strategic bomber until the B-52 assumed this role in 1958. The "Peacemaker" never dropped a bomb in anger and was held in nuclear reserve throughout the Korean conflict. One Air Force epitaph for the "massive, rumbling B-36" contends that it "single-handedly protected an entire nation while preserving the American way of life."²⁹¹ Admiral Denfeld's and the Navy's memories of this massive symbol of American strategic deterrence were not hardly as generous.

The conflict between the Navy and the Air Force continued to make headlines during the summer of 1949. One tactic which had proven successful in generating negative publicity was to distribute to newspapers across the country propaganda denigrating the capabilities of the opposing service. The Navy's supporters, following this recipe, sent copies of a lengthy pamphlet, titled "The Strategic Bombing Myth" to over 200 editors across the country.²⁹² This document took portions of the report of the Strategic Bombing Survey which had analyzed the effectiveness of strategic bombing during World War II, and presented them out of context to convey the impression that the Survey had found strategic bombing to be ineffective. The Air Force countered with a 33-page essay of their own, refuting the earlier piece of propaganda charge by charge.²⁹³ The effort involved in these anonymous attacks and the inter-service rivalry was enormous, and largely unproductive.

²⁹⁰Denfeld, "The Nation NEEDS the Navy," *Collier's*, 1 April 1950, p. 42.

²⁹¹Byard, pp. 49 - 50. A B-36 is on static display at the SAC museum in Bellevue, Nebraska.

²⁹²U.S. Department of the Air Force. Analysis of Another Anonymous Attack on the Air Force and the Concept of Aerial Warfare Held by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, unpublished manuscript, 1949, in USSTRATCOM archives, File "B-36," p. 30.

²⁹³*Ibid.*, pp. 1-33.

Admiral Denfeld continued to defend the capabilities of aircraft carriers and naval aviation, but his well-reasoned arguments were not newsworthy compared to the flamboyant charges of the anonymous pamphlets.²⁹⁴ Secretary Johnson blasted the propagandists, and particularly the Navy's "partisans," in a speech at the Naval War College on 21 June 1949 by charging that they "had twisted the facts" about the carrier cancellation and were waging "a campaign of terror against further unification of the armed forces."²⁹⁵ As Professor Isenberg has observed, "the Pentagon was sliding into anarchy," and tensions in this inter-service war were building toward a climax.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴A good example of Denfeld's rationale can be seen in his statement in U. S. Congress, House, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Department of the Navy Appropriation Bill, 1949, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 134.

²⁹⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 505.

²⁹⁶Isenberg, p. 147.

THE B-36 INVESTIGATION AND "THE REVOLT OF THE ADMIRALS"

"Nearly all dedicated military men are able to persuade themselves that what is good for their service is good for the country." (1965 - Rear Admiral D. V. Gallery, USN (Ret.))²⁹⁷

"True loyalty is loyalty not to men, but to principles." (1949 - Captain John G. Crommelin, USN, to Secretary Matthews)²⁹⁸

The most famous of the many "anonymous documents" circulated in the publicity war between the Air Force and the Navy was placed in the hands of several Congressmen and newsmen sympathetic to the Navy in May 1949. It made over thirty specific charges of corruption and malfeasance in the procurement of the B-36 bomber and in the resulting decisions of the JCS to feature this aircraft in the Nation's contingency war plans. One of these accusations claimed that Secretary Johnson had gained financially from the decision to buy large quantities of B-36s and that Air Force Secretary Symington had made a deal with Consolidated Vultee guaranteeing the Air Force's purchases of the B-36 in return for future employment with the company. If the allegations in this document were true, the United States had been cheated of millions of dollars and was relying on an inferior weapon for its security.

James Van Zandt, a Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania, introduced these charges and the document into the House record and called for a thorough investigation.²⁹⁹ The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Carl

²⁹⁷Daniel V. Gallery, Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.), Eight Bells and All's Well, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 221.

²⁹⁸Captain Crommelin statement to Secretary Matthews, quoted in Omaha World Herald, 9 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

²⁹⁹A copy of this "anonymous document" can be found in the archives of the Naval Historical Center, "Double Zero Files 1965," Box 78, File "Thirteen - B-36." Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 496.

Vinson of Georgia, had been trying to avoid adding fuel to the fire by providing a Congressional forum for the inter-service accusations, but he realized that these new charges were too significant to ignore. He also recognized that if Van Zandt, a junior Representative and a Captain in the Naval Reserve, was allowed to conduct his own investigation there would be little restraint imposed on the presentations. Therefore Vinson chose to take the matter under the auspices of the House Armed Services Committee and begin hearings in early August.³⁰⁰

The Committee met to plan these hearings on 9 June 1949 and unanimously adopted eight agenda items. They decided to address the first two items in August before holding a second session in early October to deal with the rest of the list.³⁰¹ The eight agenda items aimed to:

- 1) Establish the truth or falsity of the "Anonymous Document's" charges,
- 2) Determine the source of these charges,
- 3) Evaluate the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the B-36,
- 4) Assess the roles and missions of the Navy and the Air Force, paying particular attention to the cancellation of the U. S. S. United States,
- 5) See if the Air Force is imbalanced in favor of strategic bombing,
- 6) Assess the JCS procedures concerning weapons procurement,
- 7) Evaluate strategic bombing, and
- 8) Consider all other pertinent matters.³⁰²

³⁰⁰Love, The Chiefs of Naval Operations, p. 200. A good biographical sketch of Chairman Vinson and an account of his role in this controversy can be found in John F. Tarpey, Captain, USN, "Uncle Carl," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1982, pp. 38-45.

³⁰¹U. S. Congress. House, Committee on Armed Services, Unification and Strategy, H. Doc. 600, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 7 - 8. (Hereinafter cited as "House Unification and Strategy Report")

³⁰²Ibid.

The Committee chose these topics in order to try to bring all accusations and arguments before the public and thereby possibly settle the dispute once and for all. Obviously, some disagreements could not be aired in an open forum, but Congressman Vinson decided that as many of the sessions as possible should be unrestricted. The American people had been fed a nearly daily diet of newspaper articles and anonymous charges for several years. Now they could see whatever truth lay behind the allegations.

The armed services now set out to prepare their cases for presentation. The Air Force brought in Barton Leach, a Colonel in the Air Force Reserve and a Harvard Law Professor, to arrange its response to the anonymous charges and the Committee's agenda. A dedicated team of four investigators compiled a comprehensive document, "History of the B-36 Procurement," to serve as the basis for the service's presentation. Not neglecting its public relations opportunities, the Air Force invited the House investigating team to take up offices in the Pentagon adjacent to Colonel Leach's staff, and, by the start of the official hearings, the House team had "reached the tentative conclusion that there was no substance" to the charges.³⁰³

The Navy, in a fatal mistake, did not approach the preparation of its testimony in such a disciplined manner. In June, Under Secretary Dan Kimball initially attempted to coordinate the service's efforts.³⁰⁴ He assembled a team of nine officers and one civilian, his assistant Cedric Worth, to oversee the development of the Navy's official positions. He gave leadership of the team to Rear Admiral Brown, the President of the Naval War College. Captain Arleigh Burke, the head of the Navy's OP-23, the "Organizational Policy and Research Division," and Rear Admiral Ofstie, a member of the Military Liaison

³⁰³Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 498.

³⁰⁴The best examination of the Navy's efforts in these hearings is found in a 42-page document prepared by the Navy's "OP-23" in late 1949, entitled "A History of the Investigation of the B-36." It can be found in the Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "B-36 Investigation," Naval Historical Center. The best published sources are Barlow's The Revolt of the Admirals, and Hammond's case study.

Committee to the Atomic Energy Committee, were also on this team, and both eventually played important parts in the hearings.³⁰⁵

The Navy's team assembled appropriate records and assessed all the Committee's issues. The staff members prepared position papers on all the topics and then presented their efforts to Under Secretary Kimball on 19 July 1949. He found the positions recommended by the team "too extreme," directed Rear Admiral Brown to return to the War College, and disbanded the team. Captain Burke and the OP-23 staff were left to "pick up the pieces" because no one had been directed to rework the papers for Kimball.³⁰⁶ Burke's staff was already busy supporting requests from Admiral Denfeld's office for additional research and assistance, and consequently, according to OP-23's historical piece, the Navy's preparation "came to a virtual halt." No directives came from the Secretary of the Navy or the Chief of Naval Operations to indicate their desires. "This amorphous situation prevailed until . . . 10 August."³⁰⁷ Through disinterest or procrastination, the Navy's leaders missed an excellent opportunity to focus their arguments and possibly convince Congress that their point of view was more than the whining of spoiled and disenchanting aviators.³⁰⁸ Admiral Denfeld clearly bears the majority of the blame in this case, since Burke's OP-23 was part of his staff, and his position as the senior uniformed leader of the Navy made him responsible to provide advice to the Congress based on the service's input.

³⁰⁵"OP-23" played an important part in support of the Navy's official positions on unification and the B-36 controversy. Its history can be found in Potter's biography of Burke, pages 317-319, and in Burke's oral history transcript.

³⁰⁶Ibid., p. 11.

³⁰⁷Ibid., p. 21.

³⁰⁸The OP-23 account of these events is the most detailed available. Several other sources confirm its main points. These include Denfeld's article, "Why I Was Fired," Potter's biography of Burke, Burke's oral history interview, Barlow's assessment of the "revolt," and Hammond's case study.

The first set of hearings were held between 9 and 25 August and dealt only with the specific charges in the anonymous document. The Committee called its primary witnesses from the Air Force in order to investigate the B-36 procurement process and found not "one iota, one scintilla of evidence" to back up the charges.³⁰⁹ Secretary Symington and General Vandenberg, the Air Force Chief of Staff, made convincing presentations and cleared the B-36 program. After the document and Representative Van Zandt had been fully discredited, Cedric Worth, of Navy Under Secretary Kimball's office, came forward and admitted compiling and circulating the document. Matthews was scandalized and referred to Worth's actions as "dastardly."³¹⁰ \$16,300 had been expended by Congress to investigate the anonymous charges, identify Worth as the anonymous source, and provide the Air Force with a public podium to present its side of the controversy.³¹¹

The Committee recessed until early October and the second phase of the hearings. Burke later observed that "after the Air Force testimony, it was evident that the Navy's senior officers would have to speak for the Navy, that just a factual presentation for the Record would not be enough."³¹² The Air Force had acquitted itself so well that Matthews and Denfeld believed they needed to unify the Navy and make substantial improvements in its case or cancel the hearings and let the Navy's embarrassing defeat stand.

Rumors that Matthews and Denfeld were going to cancel the second set of hearings galvanized the agitated naval officers into action, precipitating the "revolt." The

³⁰⁹House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 8.

³¹⁰Transcript of a telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and John Giles, a reporter for the Washington Star, 1 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Truman Library.

³¹¹U. S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Investigation of the B-36 Bomber Program, H. Rept. 1470, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 34.

³¹²"OP-23 Disbanded," Army and Navy Journal, 5 November 1949, p. 251.

Air Force had softened its publicity campaign during the summer while it developed its case for the B-36 investigation. Naval officers, sensing their opportunity to finally get their "day in court," increased the volume and emotion of their public statements. Rear Admiral Gallery's "An Admiral Talks Back to the Airmen" was only one of the articles to hit the presses during this period.³¹³ Admiral Radford later observed that the events of 1949 had "convinced some of this group [naval officers] that the time had come for drastic and public reaction."³¹⁴ The Admiral went on to assert that:

Many of these young men were good friends of mine, and some had asked for my blessing in their efforts. In every case I tried to stop them, feeling that theirs was a hazardous and insubordinate course.³¹⁵

Needless to say, Radford failed in his attempts to calm the rebels.

History's view of their actions has not been kind. Air Force Colonel Meilinger, a leader of the Air War College and the biographer of General Vandenberg, writes that these officers "engineered a scandal" to allow their voices to be heard.³¹⁶ Hammond summarizes the ensuing situation quite well:

The Navy, having lost its confidence in the Office of the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of the Navy, had maneuvered the Committee into accepting this task [the second phase of the hearings], as a kind of court of appeal from its own Secretary, from the Department of Defense, the Bureau of the Budget, and the President.³¹⁷

³¹³Daniel V. Gallery, Rear Admiral, USN, "An Admiral Talks Back to the Airmen," Saturday Evening Post, 25 June 1949, pp. 25ff, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 505.

³¹⁴Jurika, p. 148.

³¹⁵Ibid., p. 160.

³¹⁶Phillip S. Meilinger, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, "The Admirals' Revolt of 1949: Lessons for Today," Parameters, September 1989, p. 82.

³¹⁷Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 552.

The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations was not included in this list of officials in which the Navy had lost faith because the CNO was expected to personify "the Navy." The rebellious officers had come to ignore Denfeld's half-hearted efforts to direct the Navy but retained their allegiance to his office as the true head of the Navy. They intended to either take Denfeld with them or work around him, but they wanted to get the opportunity to state their case. Denfeld had not yet made up his mind how he was going to approach the hearings. In a 7 September letter to Hanson W. Baldwin, the CNO wrote:

What will happen in the House Armed Services Committee when they reconvene on October 5th is anybody's guess. But the Navy is going to have its day in court at that time and I feel sure that the officers who testify will give a good account of themselves.³¹⁸

Now, at the eleventh hour, a Navy presentation was being put together more under the direction of Admiral Radford than Admiral Denfeld. Committee Chairman Vinson had recalled Radford from the Pacific to serve as a Navy witness during the first phase of hearings. Radford now collected the remnants of Under Secretary Kimball's earlier effort and began to put together a presentation strategy and a witness list.³¹⁹

Admiral Radford constructed the Navy's presentation to provide authoritative answers to the five remaining issues on the Committee's agenda. These topics included evaluating the B-36, assessing the Air Force's strategic bombing plans, examining the division of roles and missions between the services, and reviewing the implementation of military unification procedures. Congressman Vinson's Committee selected the senior Naval officers who were to present their views on the agenda, but the Navy was allowed

³¹⁸Letter from Denfeld to Hanson W. Baldwin, 7 September 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 2, File "Correspondence - B," Naval Historical Center.

³¹⁹See pages 25 and 26 of OP-23's "A History of the Investigation of the B-36," Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "B-36 Investigation," Naval Historical Center.

to choose additional witnesses to clarify its position and supply technical details, just as the Air Force had done during the first phase of the hearings.³²⁰ The majority of the Navy's active, senior admirals and some retired four and five-star officers were lined up to provide the Navy's views on the implementation of unification and the operation of the JCS. Other admirals and captains were scheduled to testify concerning the Defense Department's budgetary and procurement procedures and to discuss the roles and missions issues relating to the cancellation of the U. S. S. United States. An additional group of naval officers with specific technical expertise was added to address the B-36's performance, the capability of Navy fighters to intercept the giant bomber, and the feasibility and practicality of the strategic atomic bombing campaign envisioned by the Air Force.

The Navy's two most important witnesses were the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. No matter how well Radford orchestrated the other statements, the testimony of the Navy's uniformed and civilian chiefs would either undermine or amplify the entire presentation. The Air Force's statements in the August hearings had demonstrated that service's solidarity and ability to appear as a disciplined and single-minded organization. If Matthews and Denfeld supported Radford's team, the Navy would likewise appear to have its house in order and present its case credibly. But if the Secretary or the CNO testified in opposition to the Navy's witnesses, the latter would continue to be portrayed as undisciplined rebels who opposed civilian control and their duly appointed superiors. Matthews and Denfeld had recently shown a united front in statements to Congress in opposition to the President's recommended budget, and they had convinced Secretary Johnson to upgrade the two Essex class carriers earlier in the summer. Nevertheless, neither Matthews nor Denfeld was firmly convinced that the

³²⁰Denfeld, "Why I was Fired," p. 63.

October hearings should be held. Consequently, the October hearings on unification and strategy were certain to be filled with drama and suspense.

OP-23, the organization which Secretary Matthews eventually made to serve as the Navy's scapegoat, actually had little to do with the testimony. This small group on the CNO's staff had evolved from an organization created in 1947 to assist Secretary Forrestal in research related to the unification proposals. In this capacity it presented the Secretary with important data and views which would have been difficult to obtain by an organization outside the Navy. The head of Forrestal's organization, Captain Thackrey, was eventually removed by Secretary Sullivan in January 1949 when Thackrey unwittingly leaked material to the press which was embarrassing to the Navy. Vice Admiral Radford, then the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, chose Captain Arleigh Burke to replace him, and Burke quickly took charge and established a coherent and reasonable policy concerning contacts with the press.³²¹ His organization only provided clerical support to witnesses in the Unification and Strategy Hearings, and reviewed their draft statements to "eliminate slaps at personalities, innuendoes, and misrepresentations." Captain Burke later mentioned that his organization prepared Fleet Admiral Halsey's first draft at his request, but Halsey significantly rewrote the piece for presentation.³²²

Neither Secretary Matthews nor Admiral Denfeld, the Navy's chief spokesmen, were deeply involved in the preparation of the Navy's Congressional testimony. For different reasons, the Admiral and the Secretary chose to distance themselves from Radford's preparations. Some historians have claimed that Denfeld did not lead the Navy's efforts because he spent much of the summer of 1949 in Europe implementing the naval

³²¹Potter, Burke, pp. 318 - 21.

³²²"OP-23 Disbanded," Army and Navy Journal, 5 November 1949, p. 251.

arrangements for the new NATO alliance.³²³ This explanation is not plausible because Denfeld made only one brief trip to Europe from 29 July through 9 August 1949, in company with the other JCS members and well before the hearings were to commence.³²⁴

Hammond and Coletta attribute the Admiral's reticence to his non-combative, "conciliatory" nature and his inability to articulate his beliefs.³²⁵ But Denfeld was by no means inarticulate and had testified regularly and well before Congress. If he had decided to actively guide the development of the Navy's presentation, he certainly would have been up to the task. Although Admiral Denfeld was generally a tolerant compromiser who disliked confrontations, he understood that, short of canceling the hearings, the Navy's presentation could not be avoided. The best explanation for his having played such a small role in this process was his general pattern of leadership through delegation and the fact that he still had not made up his mind on the theme of his own testimony. Denfeld understood Admiral Radford's views on all issues under discussion and allowed him to marshal the Navy's forces in support of his position. Radford was the Navy's senior aviator and had a long history of dealing with Congress on unification and aviation issues. As the concluding witness, the CNO could either continue to play the conciliator or emphasize the Navy's points through a dramatic and assertive statement. What Denfeld ultimately decided to do would depend on the presentation's reception in Congress and on the attitude of Secretary Matthews. He therefore had to delay this decision until just before he had to present his testimony.

³²³Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 505, Love, The Chiefs of Naval Operations, p. 200, and Coletta, The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953, (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), p. 175.

³²⁴Letter from Denfeld to President Truman thanking him for the use of his personal airplane for the JCS trip to Europe, 9 August 1949, Denfeld Papers, Box 6, File Correspondence - T," Naval Historical Center, and Bradley and Blair, p. 505.

³²⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 507, and Coletta, The United States Navy and Defense Unification, p. 175.

The Secretary also faced a dilemma. His legal background led him to approach the hearings "with great care," as if he were presenting a brief before the Supreme Court.³²⁶ Although he understood the need for a strong and capable Navy, he also was convinced that the inter-service arguments of the previous two years had been both undignified and counterproductive. He wanted the Navy's witnesses to explain their service's capabilities "and not discuss the B-36 or the Air Force unless we have to do it in answering questions," but he did not impose these restrictions for fear of impinging on the witnesses' freedom to testify.³²⁷ Matthews' sensitivity to this concern was pointed out in his opening remarks during the hearings: "There has been no censorship. There will be none."³²⁸

Perhaps a greater concern to Secretary Matthews was his commitment to the President to support unification and to Secretary Johnson to support his programs outside the councils of the Defense Department. Admiral Radford claimed that Matthews believed "he had to give Mr. Johnson his complete loyalty and was inclined to suspect the loyalty of his immediate subordinates in the Navy."³²⁹ This mindset made his role in the development of the Navy's case more like that of an outsider than that of the Navy's leader. The essence of the testimony being orchestrated by Radford's team was in opposition to Secretary Johnson's policies. Therefore Matthews could not reconcile his obligation to his superior with the positions being advocated by the Navy's witnesses. Admiral Radford suggested that the Secretary conclude the Navy's presentation, thinking that, seeing a unified Navy position, the Secretary would realize the depth of feeling in the

³²⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Admiral Radford, 24 September 1949, Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center.

³²⁷Ibid.

³²⁸Statement of Secretary of the Navy Francis P. Matthews before the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, 6 October 1949, Transcript in the Matthews Papers, File "B-36 Investigation," Truman Library, p. 1.

³²⁹Jurika, p. 160.

Navy and support their position, but Matthews felt he needed to be the first witness.³³⁰

The Secretary was clearly uncomfortable with the entire process and was very interested in postponing or canceling the October hearings.

Matthews and Denfeld continued to maintain good relations during this period. On the first of October the Secretary informed John Giles of the Washington Star that he and the Admiral had been "working in perfect harmony" on the preparations for the Navy's testimony. Matthews also told Giles that there had been no "pressure from above" on their presentation.³³¹ During September, the Navy Secretary had traveled to Hawaii on an inspection trip and had made a good impression on Admiral Radford, who wrote to Denfeld:

I feel that Mr. Matthews is the kind of man who will stand up for what he thinks is right against any opposition, and therefore, if he is given a good basic understanding of naval problems, will represent us in a way that we have not been represented in some time. He is a man you can certainly talk to and trust; who certainly likes you personally and who, I am sure, wants to establish a very close and personal liaison with you.³³²

Although the fact that the Navy's two leaders had not already "established a close liaison" after working together for four months may indicate that there were some difficulties, it does not appear that there were any severe tensions in their relationship.

As Admiral Radford began to build the Navy's presentation, Secretary Johnson announced an additional \$353 million cut in the Navy's budget for the current fiscal year. This reduction would cut deeply into the Navy's aircraft procurement allowances and

³³⁰Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 513.

³³¹Transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and John Giles of the Washington Star, 1 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Truman Library.

³³²Letter from Radford to Denfeld, 10 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center.

incensed many naval aviators already up in arms over previous restrictions. One such pilot, Captain John G. Crommelin, elected to take his concerns outside the Pentagon, and on 10 September 1949, called a press conference at his home to present his views on unification and the budget cuts. Captain Crommelin was one of five brothers who had fought in the Navy against Japan. Two of the five had given their lives for their country and all had distinguished themselves.³³³ Captain John Crommelin claimed that unification had been "a terrible mistake" and that the Navy was being eliminated by the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His reputation and his position as a member of the Pentagon's Joint Staff gave his statements credibility, and the sensational nature of the charges ensured that they received wide publicity. He openly stated that he intended to "blow the whole thing open," understanding that he would probably be court-martialed for his actions.³³⁴ In short order, retired Fleet Admiral Halsey and other senior officers issued statements supporting Crommelin's assertions. A full-fledged public brawl had now begun, not between the services, but between the Navy and its civilian leadership.

Admiral Denfeld did not respond directly to Captain Crommelin's brazen violation of military procedures and protocol. In fact, the CNO agreed with Under Secretary Kimball's position that Captain Crommelin was free to state his personal views at any time and that no disciplinary action should be taken. As Paul Hammond notes, "Denfeld's reaction was to ignore the unpleasant affair."³³⁵ Secretary Matthews issued a statement that Crommelin's actions indicated he was not qualified to serve on the Joint Staff and that he would be transferred from that position. On 15 September, in what appeared to be another slap at civilian control, the offending aviator was given a Rear Admiral's position on the Navy Staff. The press quickly noted this move and hailed it as a promotion for the

³³³Ibid., p. 507.

³³⁴Crommelin statement of 10 September 1949, quoted in Ibid., p. 508.

³³⁵Ibid., p. 508.

outspoken Captain. Secretary Matthews was furious. Denfeld disavowed any knowledge of the move and quickly shifted Crommelin to a different staff job under a Rear Admiral.³³⁶ Although Captain Crommelin was now in a position where he was not required to deal with officers from the other services, the Navy had not addressed his complaints and its leadership had been exposed as confused and divided.

Captain Crommelin had stirred up a hornet's nest by obliging the Secretary and the CNO to issue promptly to their subordinates a "guidance" memorandum on public statements. This memo stated that all speeches and articles intended for public release must be transmitted through proper channels to the Secretary of the Navy for prepublication review. The Navy's leaders were careful to issue this new policy as guidance and not as an order. They understood that emotions were running high and that any official "gag orders" would be severely criticized.³³⁷ Matthews and Denfeld were also concerned that Captain Crommelin would not retire from the public scene quietly. In order to prevent a recurrence of his impromptu press conference, Admiral Denfeld issued a direct, written order to the Captain prohibiting him from discussing "matters pertaining to relations between the military departments . . . in public speech or by publication" until otherwise directed.³³⁸ The CNO also enlisted the aid of Rear Admiral Clark, a close friend of Crommelin's brother Charles, in pacifying the recalcitrant aviator.³³⁹ The Secretary's

³³⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p.3. Admiral Denfeld claims that he directed a subordinate to give Crommelin a billet and was unaware that the billet chosen was a Rear Admiral's slot. This argument is hardly credible, given that Admiral Denfeld was known as a personnel expert, had spent four years assigning senior officers to staff positions, and certainly understood the sensitivity of any action involving Captain Crommelin.

³³⁷Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 508, and Omaha World Herald, 16 September 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

³³⁸Memorandum from Admiral Denfeld to Captain Crommelin, "By direction of the Secretary of the Navy," undated, in Matthews Papers, File "Official Correspondence - 1949," Truman Library.

³³⁹J. J. Clark, Rear Admiral, USN, (Ret.) and Clark G. Reynolds, Carrier Admiral, (New York: David McKay Company, 1967), p. 263.

Public Relations Officer, Captain Karig, added his efforts to prevent Crommelin "from going off the rails once more, . . . making a damn fool martyr of himself."³⁴⁰ With the Congressional hearings on unification and strategy scheduled to begin in two weeks, it was imperative that the Navy keep its discipline if it held any hopes of convincing not only the House, but also its own Secretary of the merits of its case.

Secretary Matthews successfully headed off a Navy protest to Congress on the additional budget cut by convincing the Navy's staff that any objections must be discussed with Secretary Johnson before the Navy Secretary would bring them to Congress' attention. Matthews understood the Department's civilian chain of command well and was not about to make a habit of running to Congress rather than his boss with every problem.³⁴¹ While the Secretary was dealing with his service's internal conflicts, Chairman Vinson was working to cancel the October hearings. As a preliminary step, two members of the House investigating team met with Matthews on 27 September and convinced him to direct Navy witnesses not to mention the B-36 in their statements unless directly questioned about it.³⁴² This order would hamstring the case that Radford had been building, eliminating all arguments about the inability of the Air Force to accomplish its strategic bombing mission, one of the group's key points. Ultimately, this direction was rescinded, and even Secretary Matthews' own statement discussed the B-36.

Admiral Denfeld's position in September was very shaky. Secretary Matthews had at least a desire to work with the CNO in running the Department, but the Navy's other senior officers were following Radford's lead rather than the CNO's. The main reason for this was that Denfeld was not leading at all. He had no announced position, "holding

³⁴⁰Memorandum from Captain Karig to Admiral Denfeld, 4 October 1949, in the Chief of Naval Operations files, "Double Zero Files," 1965, Box 78, File "13, B-36," Naval Historical Center.

³⁴¹Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 509.

³⁴²Ibid.

himself aloof in his chosen role as conciliator."³⁴³ The Admiral had already lost a great deal of respect in the eyes of his subordinates for not resigning over Johnson's carrier cancellation and for opposing the test proposed between the B-36 and the Navy fighter. Now, by having Radford direct the Navy's preparations for the Congressional hearings, he was almost abdicating his responsibilities. Admiral Conolly, the Navy's European Commander, recalled that "everybody knew Louis Denfeld was skating on thin ice except Louis. Denfeld thought he was going to get the support of Mr. Vinson and the people up on the Hill, and they'd keep the political scene in check, but he underestimated Louis Johnson."³⁴⁴ Even Admiral Denfeld was beginning to realize that if he wanted to help the Navy and earn the loyalty of his men, he needed to stand up for his beliefs and rally the Navy around him. That was, after all, the CNO's job.

The Navy's case was taking its final shape in the last days of September. Admiral Radford staged a practice session for the senior admirals, most of whom afterward endorsed his approach. But Admiral Conolly strongly objected and denounced the presentation as "an animal act," and "too aviation-oriented." He and Admiral Denfeld discussed these objections with Secretary Matthews who gave Conolly the impression that he agreed with his position and would work to reorganize the presentation.³⁴⁵ Denfeld noted that the Secretary was "very much disturbed about this B-36 investigation, . . . and is taking a great interest in the presentations."³⁴⁶ Matthews himself remarked to a reporter on 1 October that "we've been in [practice] session for four or five days, so much so that

³⁴³Potter, *Burke*, p. 324.

³⁴⁴Interview with Richard L. Conolly, Admiral, USN (Ret.), by Donald P. Shaughnessy, 1958 - 1959, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, Transcript, 1960, Naval Historical Center, p. 397.

³⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 394.

³⁴⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Admiral Radford, 24 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center.

I'm beginning to get a little bit weary."³⁴⁷ Despite all this work, there were reports that Johnson had directed Matthews to "suppress the whole thing," and Chairman Vinson's thinly veiled intention to cancel the October hearings was an ever-present concern to the Navy partisans.³⁴⁸ Something certainly seemed wrong when Secretary Matthews, who had earlier told Denfeld that he planned to sit through the presentation's final dry run on the fourth and fifth of October, skipped the sessions entirely.³⁴⁹

Just as Admiral Radford was planning his final practice sessions, another public storm hit the Navy and the CNO. Secretary Matthews had asked that all officers route any opinions on unification and the B-36 through his office before releasing them to the media. He also requested opinions and advice from naval personnel on the major issues facing the Department to use in preparing for the upcoming hearings. Vice Admiral Bogan, the Commander of the First Task Fleet in the Pacific, in compliance with this guidance wrote the Secretary a short letter on 20 September to tell him of the state of Navy morale and the fleet's continuing fears regarding the Navy's position relative to the other services. Bogan stated that "the morale of the Navy is lower today than at any time since I entered the commissioned ranks in 1916. . . . In my opinion this descent, almost to despondency, stems from complete confusion as to the future role of the Navy." He went on to describe the members of his fleet's concerns about national security given the current size of the Navy and he voiced his whole-hearted support for Crommelin's views on

³⁴⁷Transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and John Giles of the Washington Star, 1 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Truman Library.

³⁴⁸Conolly interview, p. 395, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 513.

³⁴⁹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Admiral Radford, 24 September 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 5, File "Correspondence - R," Naval Historical Center, Hammond, Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 513, and Secretary of the Navy's Appointment Calendar, 4 - 5 October 1949, in Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

unification.³⁵⁰ As a confidential memorandum, this letter was not open to the public and was of little significance.

Vice Admiral Bogan routed his letter through official channels in accordance with Matthews' "guidance." Therefore Admiral Radford, as the Commander of the Pacific Fleet, and Admiral Denfeld reviewed his submittal and attached forwarding endorsements before it reached the Secretary's office. Radford agreed with Bogan's views and asserted that "rightly or wrongly, the majority of officers in the Pacific Fleet concur with Captain Crommelin. . . . It would be a grave mistake to underestimate the depth and sincerity of their feelings."³⁵¹ Denfeld, in his attachment to this correspondence, stated that

I concur in the endorsement of Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet. Naval Officers have faith in the Navy and a knowledge of the aggressive role it plays in the defense of the country. They are convinced that a Navy stripped of its offensive power means a nation stripped of its offensive power.³⁵²

He went on to add a quote from Fleet Admiral King, the CNO during World War II, supporting this view: "Any step that is not good for the Navy is not good for the nation."³⁵³ At the time, this endorsement seemed inconsequential. Admiral Bogan's letter and the attachments reached the Secretary's office by 29 September. Denfeld later recorded that "the Secretary did not show any concern over the letter when it was an internal matter," but, of course in the Navy of 1949, very little stayed out of the public eye.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰Letter from Vice Admiral Gerald Bogan to Secretary Matthews, 20 September 1949, reprinted in Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 510.

³⁵¹Endorsement of Admiral Radford on Vice Admiral Bogan's letter to Secretary Matthews, 22 September 1949, reprinted in Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 511.

³⁵²Endorsement of Admiral Denfeld on Vice Admiral Bogan's letter to Secretary Matthews, 28 September 1949, reprinted in Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 511.

³⁵³Ibid.

³⁵⁴Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 15.

Saturday and Sunday, October first and second, were the last days of the Navy's semi-orderly approach to the hearings on unification and strategy. On the first, Secretary Matthews discussed the proposed \$353 million spending cut with Secretary Johnson and was granted a formal hearing to be held in the near future to assess other options. Matthews' strategy of working through the Defense Secretary seemed to be the correct one after all. On that same day, Captain Crommelin appeared on "Meet the Press." This opportunity for disaster was avoided through the CNO's recent order to Crommelin not to discuss unification or any inter-service issues.³⁵⁵ The Navy and the Defense Department appeared to be returning to at least a civil relationship.

The highlight of Sunday, October second was a dinner party held at the Denfeld's residence at the Naval Observatory. The guests of honor were Secretary and Mrs. Matthews and their mutual friend, Monsignor Maurice Sheehy of Catholic University. In discussing the upcoming dinner, Matthews told Sheehy that he expected "it'll be a very enjoyable evening. I've been very anxious to have Mrs. Matthews get closer acquainted with Mrs. Denfeld . . ." ³⁵⁶ Later in his conversation with Father Sheehy, the Secretary praised his working relations with the CNO:

There's no, absolutely no cramping of any Admiral's style. We're working together in the most beautiful harmony and I think as constructively as ever, as there's ever been any work done for the Navy. There's strong opinions of course but I wouldn't want these men around me if they didn't have strong opinions. They'd be no good to me [as "yes men"] . . . because they know more about the Navy than I do.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 511.

³⁵⁶Transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and Father Maurice Sheehy, 1 October 1949, in Matthews Papers, Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Truman Library.

³⁵⁷Ibid.

After the dinner party Denfeld commented that the Secretary "gave no indication then that he had any but the highest regard for me."³⁵⁸ These records indicate that the Matthews/Denfeld team was solid and ready to face the upcoming hearings, but other signs did not support this optimistic outlook.

Denfeld had been nominated for a second term by Secretary Matthews earlier in the year, but he had not been the only candidate for the position. According to Matthews, Admiral Blandy had nearly demanded to be made CNO during the Secretary's first few weeks in office.³⁵⁹ Admiral Conolly also had a claim to the Navy's "throne" as Denfeld's successor based on promises by Secretary Sullivan and Denfeld himself. Conolly recalled that after Secretary Matthews took office, Admiral Denfeld had told him that he was still slated to relieve Denfeld as the next CNO.³⁶⁰ And Vice Admiral Forrest Sherman, the Commander of the Fifth Task Fleet in the Mediterranean, was frequently mentioned by Secretary Matthews as an officer he admired and respected.³⁶¹ Johnson also expressed some interest in these officers, stating in September 1949 that Conolly and Blandy were the only admirals of whom he had "a high opinion."³⁶² When the Navy Secretary began to develop doubts about the wisdom of retaining Denfeld during the fall of 1949, these three officers were the front-runners in his secret search for a new Navy Chief.

Admiral Blandy was the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet and next in seniority behind Denfeld. He was a "battleship admiral" who had distinguished himself in combat and never hesitated to take on difficult problems. His strong views had cost him his chance for the CNO position in 1947 and they continued to keep him from it in

³⁵⁸Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 15.

³⁵⁹John A. Giles, "The Navy's Secretary Walks Alone," Washington Star, 23 October 1949, p. C-1.

³⁶⁰Conolly interview, p. 392.

³⁶¹Martin S. Hayden, "'Inside' Given by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 8 November 1949.

³⁶²Conolly interview, p. 398.

1949.³⁶³ When Matthews sat in on the practice sessions for the Congressional hearings, Blandy's statement was as aggressive and anti-establishment as the rebellious aviators'. Matthews knew that replacing Denfeld with a dogmatic fighter was not a viable option.

According to Admiral Richard Conolly, Matthews knew that Conolly was also very interested in being the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Secretary seemed to think that he would be more flexible than Blandy. Matthews approached Admiral Conolly during the preparation of the Navy's presentation and told him "that things were not going right between him and Denfeld, and he wanted my [Conolly's] support."³⁶⁴ When Conolly seemed to respond positively, Matthews went on to tender what Conolly immediately perceived as an amazing bribe.

I was Mr. Matthews' choice to succeed Denfeld. He practically told me so. If Denfeld couldn't stay, he'd like to rely on me. . . . He gave me to understand unmistakably that what I said in testimony would have a great deal to do with my future career.³⁶⁵

Although Conolly felt that "Denfeld was completely under the control of Radford," and was leading the Navy in a direction Conolly thought was hazardous, he eventually decided that he wanted no part in this type of political game.³⁶⁶ His statement on 12 October before the House Armed Services Committee pulled no punches and lost him his chance to lead the Navy. Conolly's recollections placed Matthews' veiled offer about one week before the hearings began, clearly indicating that the Secretary was at least leaving his

³⁶³Blandy and Denfeld had been Forrestal's final two candidates in 1947. The Secretary's opinion that the President would find Denfeld easier to work with apparently decided the issue.

³⁶⁴Conolly interview, p. 395.

³⁶⁵Ibid., p. 396.

³⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 393 and 397. Conolly repeatedly met with the Secretary during the first days of the hearings, spending more time in his office than Denfeld did. (Secretary Matthews' appointment calendar, Truman Library)

options open while he worked with Admiral Denfeld to control the dissension within the Navy.

The third officer on Matthews' rapidly shrinking list was Vice Admiral Forrest Sherman. Although he was only tenth in seniority on the Navy list, his previous experience as DCNO for Operations under Nimitz during the unification debates had built this naval aviator a strong reputation. Matthews stated that even before he became Secretary of the Navy, he "had been impressed with Sherman." As Truman's nominee for the Navy position, Matthews had read the record of the 1947 Congressional hearings on unification in which Sherman had testified eloquently. Regarding this testimony, Matthews asserted:

As a lawyer . . . I was impressed by Sherman as the most intellectual witness to appear for either side. When I came to Washington I asked where he was. . . . I found that those whom I had begun to feel opposed unification regarded him with great bitterness.³⁶⁷

In Forrest Sherman, Matthews had found an ideal choice for CNO. He was an aviator with a brilliant war record who had maintained a low profile during the acrimonious public debates of the previous year. Over the course of several meetings during the summer of 1949, the two had built a good relationship.

With Secretary Matthews still undecided about replacing Admiral Denfeld and the scheduled start of the hearings only two days away, Congressman Vinson renewed his attempts to at least delay, if not cancel, the testimony before his Committee. On 3 October he called a meeting between the Navy's leaders and selected members of his Committee to discuss their options. Secretary Matthews supported Vinson's request to

³⁶⁷Martin S. Hayden, "'Inside' Given by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 8 November 1949, and Omaha World Herald, 1 December 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

delay the start of the Navy's presentation until after Congress' Christmas break because he wished to present the Navy's case to Secretary Johnson before public hearings began. Admiral Denfeld agreed, believing that the delay would give him "the chance, which he had not yet had, to study the material prepared in the Navy for presentation."³⁶⁸ After his removal, Denfeld gave a different rationale for this decision, contending that he was willing to defer the hearings to allow the Navy to make "a studied and orderly presentation."³⁶⁹ Paul Hammond states that some naval officers, led by Vice Admiral Price, Denfeld's Vice Chief of Naval Operations, did not support the group's decision to delay the hearings, and called Admiral Radford to Vinson's meeting. Hammond credits Radford with persuading Vinson that the hearings should be held as scheduled.³⁷⁰ But, this explanation hardly seems plausible. A more credible explanation can be found in the record of an interview given by Matthews on 8 November in which he reported that the 3 October meeting adjourned with an agreement to delay the hearings but that Captain Crommelin's actions later the same night forced Congressman Vinson to return to the initial plan.³⁷¹

Captain Crommelin, in his new position on the Navy's staff, was able to keep close watch on the Navy's preparations for the Congressional hearings and the maneuverings of the senior leadership. After hearing of the decision to delay the Navy's "day in court," the Captain obtained copies of Vice Admiral Bogan's letter to Secretary Matthews and the endorsements of Admirals Radford and Denfeld and distributed them to several local newsmen with the understanding that he not be identified as the source. The headlines the next morning were full of references to the poor state of Navy morale and the breadth of

³⁶⁸Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 511.

³⁶⁹Denfeld, "Why I was Fired," p. 63.

³⁷⁰Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 511.

³⁷¹Hayden, Martin S., "'Inside' Given by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 8 November 1949.

Navy opposition to unification. Matthews and Vinson quickly realized that this new storm had forced their hand and returned the hearings on unification and strategy to their original schedule. This and anything else which could end the embarrassing intra-Navy and inter-service conflicts had to be tried.

Secretary Matthews later stated that he believed it was "more than coincidental" that the leak occurred on the night he and Chairman Vinson decided to delay the hearings.³⁷² The first person Matthews suspected of having distributed the Bogan correspondence was Vice Admiral Price, the most outspoken officer on 3 October against delay of the hearings. Matthews told Denfeld that he suspected the VCNO to be the culprit and asked the CNO to "give some thought to taking Admiral Sherman as your Vice-CNO."³⁷³ While this suggestion was offered for future consideration, the Secretary ordered an immediate investigation to locate the source of the leak. Captain Crommelin, realizing that his object had been achieved, quickly admitted to distributing the copies in order to ensure the Navy's case would be heard.

Although most citizens, and even most naval officers, deplored Crommelin's methods, he certainly achieved his immediate objective, but there was a high price to be paid for this success.³⁷⁴ With the hearings opening on the following day, the Secretary of the Navy and the CNO were sharply divided in their views of the Navy's case. Matthews had had enough of the bickering and intended to pull no punches in his opening statement. Crommelin's actions had convinced him that the most outspoken of his subordinates did not merit his support. Denfeld was unable to abandon ship so easily. The CNO

³⁷²Ibid.

³⁷³Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 63.

³⁷⁴Edward P. Stafford, Commander USN (Ret.), "Saving Carrier Aviation - 1949 Style," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1990, pp. 44-51 provides a good view of this incident from Captain Crommelin's perspective. Commander Stafford based his article on an interview with Crommelin over 40 years after the episode.

understood the gravity of the issues involved and realized that persevering in his attempts at compromise would be fruitless. His careful consideration of his options was perceived by his subordinates as a lack of leadership and disinclination to stand up for the Navy's interests. This amplified their growing disenchantment with the CNO.³⁷⁵

After the leak Secretary Matthews set up a meeting with Captain Crommelin to discuss loyalty and discipline. The Secretary, having only been in a military structure for five months was in a difficult position trying to convince a twenty-five year battle-hardened veteran that he did not understand loyalty, but Matthews made a valiant attempt. What ensued turned out to be a leadership lesson for the lawyer from Omaha. The Omaha World Herald reported that:

quietly Captain Crommelin explained to the Secretary that the Naval Academy had taught him, and life had confirmed, that true loyalty is loyalty not to men, but to principles. "Experience has convinced me," Captain Crommelin told Mr. Matthews, "that you can't get loyalty from the men beneath you by demanding it. What you get is counterfeit loyalty - not worth a damn when the shooting begins. There's only one way to get loyalty, and that's to be lucky enough to inspire it."³⁷⁶

If anything was missing from the Navy's leadership it was "inspiration." If Captain Crommelin's words and not his actions had been followed by more naval officers, much of the problems which followed could have been avoided. After the meeting, Crommelin described the Secretary as "a good Joe; a fine chap, trying to do a job under impossible circumstances."³⁷⁷ Matthews probably wished that it was as easy to win over the President and Congress.

³⁷⁵Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 512.

³⁷⁶Omaha World Herald, 9 October 1949, in the clipping files of the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

³⁷⁷Ibid.

Public opinion also strongly objected to the tactics used by the Navy. One example of public reaction is a letter from Francis D. Felps of St. Louis to the President: "Concerning the current mutiny in the Navy, I have not the faintest notion about the merits of the Navy's case, but their methods stink."³⁷⁸ Despite this negative public reaction, Admiral Denfeld discerned a bright side to the affair. Captain Karig, the Navy's Public Affairs Officer, immediately wrote to the CNO: "Publication of your Bogan endorsement has done more to raise your prestige with the fleet than anything you have yet done and it was needed."³⁷⁹ Despite his best efforts, Denfeld had become recognized as just another "revolting admiral."

The story of Admiral Denfeld's endorsement of Vice Admiral Bogan's letter and its impact on his relationship with Secretary Matthews goes much deeper than these surface manifestations. Secretary Matthews saw Bogan's submission as more than just a note to the boss informing him of the author's thoughts and perceptions. Although the Secretary received several similar letters from other senior officers, he believed that Bogan had intended all along to publish his views and wanted to see the Secretary's response.³⁸⁰ Bogan had testified against the unification proposals of 1947 and was known to Matthews as an opponent of his policies. Matthews also found that Bogan's letter had been "circulated among various widely-scattered commands before it ever reached my desk," leading him to believe that the letter had not been "originally prepared just to inform

³⁷⁸Letter from Francis D. Felps to President Truman, 8 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Official Files, File "Navy Correspondence 1949," Truman Library.

³⁷⁹Letter from Captain Karig to Admiral Denfeld, 4 October 1949, Chief of Naval Operations Papers, "Double Zero Files - 1965," Box 78, File "13, B-36," Naval Historical Center.

³⁸⁰Paolo Coletta's *The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953*, (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), p. 204 lists several other letters to the Secretary during this period which are filed in the Chief of Naval Operations Papers.

me."³⁸¹ When it found its way to the media in early October, Matthews was angered but not surprised.

The circumstance that upset Matthews the most was the airing of Admiral Denfeld's outspoken views. The Secretary was surprised that Admiral Denfeld's endorsement read as strongly as it did. Radford's endorsement was brief and restrained and similar to many statements he had made in Congressional testimony. Its only noteworthy aspect was Radford's agreement with Vice Admiral Bogan that the majority of the officers in the Pacific Fleet shared Captain Crommelin's concerns. Denfeld had previously exercised great care in avoiding being perceived as one of the Navy's radicals and had downplayed the scope of the unrest in the service. His endorsement to the Bogan letter was significantly more emotional and partisan than anything else he had written. It also differs from his other public statements in containing very little of Denfeld's own words. The endorsement centered around a lengthy quote from Fleet Admiral King, the Navy's World War II CNO. What especially got Denfeld in trouble was his opening statement of agreement with Radford's endorsement. This made it seem that Denfeld had joined the camp of the Navy's radicals. Transmitting Admiral King's fiery words (which included the phrase "any step that is not good for the Navy is not good for the nation") added to the endorsement's vehemence. In this sense, too, Denfeld's endorsement was very much out of character.

Matthews observed that "such an opinion was completely contrary to what he [the CNO] had told me he believed when, just a few weeks before, I had recommended his reappointment."³⁸² Denfeld informed Senator Knowland in February 1950 that "since it [the endorsement] was a confidential letter and an internal matter within the Department, I

³⁸¹Martin S. Hayden, "'Inside' Given by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 8 November 1949.

³⁸²Ibid.

felt I should give him the benefit of my views." The Admiral went on to state that he had told Matthews the morning after the correspondence was published that "had I known it was going to be made public, I would not have written the endorsement in the way I did, as I felt it might have been misinterpreted."³⁸³ It remains a mystery why Denfeld had not verbally communicated his true feelings to the Secretary during their daily meetings if he had actually felt this strongly at any time.

An even more disturbing revelation about the Admiral's endorsement quickly came to light. Secretary Matthews may have noted how uncharacteristic Denfeld's submission was and asked Vice Admiral Sherman about it. Although it will probably never be known for certain what actually prompted the discussion of the matter between Sherman and Matthews, the Secretary informed the Senate Armed Services Committee that it was Sherman who effectively sunk Denfeld by explaining that Denfeld had not actually written the endorsement. Matthews testified that Admiral Sherman "told me that a rough draft was prepared, that that draft was put on after the signature was signed. Now, how thoroughly, if at all, Admiral Denfeld examined that draft, I do not know."³⁸⁴ Matthews concluded that his CNO was irresponsibly administering his office if he would sign a "blank check" and allow some staff member to write what purported to be Denfeld's personal views about a critical issue for transmission to the Secretary.

³⁸³Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

³⁸⁴Excerpt from Secretary Matthews' testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 30 January 1950 contained in Admiral Denfeld's letter to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library. Secretary Matthews' testimony was given to explain his rationale for removing Admiral Denfeld. This lengthy discussion was held in executive session and the transcript is unavailable, but some excerpts from the Secretary's statement and Admiral Denfeld's rebuttal are available in the Matthews Papers.

Denfeld presented his side of this story in detail in his letter to Senator Knowland.³⁸⁵ The CNO admitted to having signed the endorsement before it was typed, but explained his reasons for this procedure. His Executive Assistant "normally would have prepared the endorsement," but since he was out of town, Denfeld's Aide for JCS matters, Captain Woodyard drafted the note. Denfeld was eager to get the Bogan correspondence to the Secretary "without delay," since Matthews had previously stated that he wanted to use this type of material in the Congressional hearings. Denfeld stated that Woodyard

presented his draft endorsement to me and, as I recall it, I changed a few words in the text and cut out the last paragraph. I was waiting to sign the endorsement when I received word that the Secretary was waiting for me to go to the plane which was to take us to New York for the Armed Forces Industrial Association dinner that evening. My secretary suggested, in order to not delay me, that I sign a blank piece of paper and that she would type the endorsement on it and that it would be transmitted to the Secretary's office. This was not an unusual procedure, and I knew what was to be in the endorsement and had complete confidence in Captain Woodyard and my secretary, who had been with me approximately 7 years. The letter and the endorsement reached the Secretary's office later that day, [28 September] and the Secretary did not mention the letter to me until the 4th of October, five days later.³⁸⁶

Denfeld's final endorsement ends with the three paragraph quote from Admiral King, an unusual procedure in official endorsements. According to standard correspondence practice, the concluding paragraph that Denfeld struck out would normally have been some type of summation of his personal views. That Denfeld felt uncomfortable providing a definitive personal assessment of Bogan's assertions is in character and lends credence to his explanation.

³⁸⁵Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, pp. 3 - 4.

³⁸⁶Ibid.

Even though Denfeld did not find this process "unusual," Matthews viewed it in a much less favorable light, agreeing with Senator Morse that it was "not customary to good management of an officer's affairs."³⁸⁷ Secretary Matthews did not publicly raise this aspect of the Bogan incident, only discussing it in Congressional executive session and in private conversation with trusted friends. The Secretary's handling of this aspect of the Bogan matter demonstrates that he retained a concern for Admiral Denfeld's reputation. Additionally, the fact that Matthews saw this incident as a major problem while Denfeld considered it insignificant, indicates the width of the communication gap which existed between the Navy's leaders. The interactions involving the Bogan correspondence also show that Admiral Sherman may have played an even greater part than previously realized in the events leading up to the firing of Admiral Denfeld.

The CNO's investigation into how the Bogan correspondence found its way into Captain Crommelin's hands ultimately determined that although Vice Admiral Price had no hand in the affair, his office was deeply involved. The CNO and VCNO shared their highly classified files to simplify security arrangements. Therefore, the staffs of both officers had access to the letters. Admiral Denfeld told Senator Knowland that he discovered that "Admiral Price's first assistant had taken the letter out of the files on two or three occasions and had made copies of it. . . . The Inspector General found no one in my immediate office culpable with regard to the release of this letter."³⁸⁸ The investigation cleared Denfeld of any direct responsibility for the leak, but the CNO's excuse seems weak. The VCNO was Admiral Denfeld's primary assistant and they shared office areas. A stronger position would have been to accept the blame for this incident as the officer responsible for the Navy's performance, and particularly, the performance of

³⁸⁷Ibid., p. 6.

³⁸⁸Ibid., p. 5.

the Navy Staff. Denfeld's attitude illustrates why he had such a difficult time engendering loyalty amongst his subordinates. A leader can have little effective authority unless he accepts the accompanying accountability.

Secretary Matthews' morning routine in Washington was to get up early and attend the dawn mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral. He then went to his apartment, had breakfast, and read the morning papers.³⁸⁹ On Tuesday the fourth of October 1949, the Navy Secretary's morning ritual was badly disturbed as he found the Bogan letters splashed across the front pages. His position seemed to be worse than ever before as his subordinates now publicly bucked his authority and continued to embarrass the Department. When he arrived at the Pentagon, he immediately called Admiral Denfeld to his office to discuss the situation.³⁹⁰

Matthews recalled that at this meeting he asked Denfeld how the letters had been released and then directed him to make an investigation of the matter. Matthews later informed the President that he "frankly stated" to Denfeld that "his usefulness as Chief of Naval Operations had terminated."³⁹¹ The Secretary later told Truman that the CNO's handling of his endorsement, "coupled with other things that happened," led to his decision to replace the Admiral.³⁹² The Omaha World Herald's Washington correspondent confirmed Matthews' intent on 6 November 1949 by reporting that "back on October 4, . . . Mr. Matthews told this reporter confidentially that Admiral Denfeld 'has outlived his usefulness in the post of Chief of Naval Operations.'"³⁹³

³⁸⁹John A. Giles, "The Navy's Secretary Walks Alone," Washington Star, 23 October 1949, p. C-1.

³⁹⁰Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 4 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

³⁹¹Letter from Secretary Matthews to President Truman, 27 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Official Files, File "Navy Correspondence 1949," Truman Library.

³⁹²Martin S. Hayden, "'Inside' Given by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 8 November 1949, and Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p. 7, quoting from Matthews' testimony, p. 180.

³⁹³"Admirals Still are Muttering Among Selves," Omaha World Herald, 6 November 1949, p. 1.

Matthews' statement, in isolation, seems fairly clear in its implication that Admiral Denfeld would be replaced as CNO, but that was far from the reality of the situation. Secretary Matthews' session with the CNO lasted about fifteen minutes. He then went to see Deputy Secretary of Defense Steve Early to discuss the situation with him. These two officials met for several hours, but there is no record of their conversation.³⁹⁴ The next day, Matthews and Johnson met with President Truman, and the Navy Secretary "mentioned the possibility of Admiral Denfeld's replacement" to the President.³⁹⁵ Truman's reaction is not recorded.

Admiral Denfeld's account of his meeting with Secretary Matthews differs on several points and is important in understanding the controversy that later swirled around the Secretary's removal of the CNO. Denfeld's confidential letter of 9 February 1950 to Senator Knowland described this meeting in detail. He also covered it in more general terms in his 18 March 1950 Collier's article, "Why I Was Fired." The Admiral remembered that Matthews "was really much disturbed that the letter was published," and asked him about his endorsement. When questioned, Denfeld admitted to having not written the letter and also to having not read the final copy. He also stated that "I knew what was in it."³⁹⁶ Denfeld recalled that the Secretary then told him

that he was sorry I had placed the endorsement on the letter, and *was afraid it might impair my value as CNO*. But he continued, "I have had worse

³⁹⁴Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 4 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

³⁹⁵Letter from Secretary Matthews to President Truman, 27 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, White House Official Files, File "Navy Correspondence 1949," Truman Library. Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 512 also discusses this situation and comments on the ambiguity of Mr. Matthews' statement.

³⁹⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p. 4. Matthews' questions would seem unusual unless he had already been told (by Sherman?) that the CNO did not write the endorsement. After all, it did have his signature on it and had come from his office.

situations than this confront me and I am sure that if we work together we can overcome this one." (emphasis added)³⁹⁷

Matthews then directed Denfeld to prepare a public statement to clarify the intent and circumstances of the Bogan correspondence and to investigate the leak in the Department's security. In his Collier's article, the Admiral added that as this session was breaking up, "Secretary Matthews said genially, 'I don't like all this formality of titles between us. I wish you'd call me Frank and I'll call you Louis.'"³⁹⁸ It is hard to understand why, after having worked under great stress and in close quarters for over four months, Matthews would choose this opportunity to ask the CNO to be more familiar with him. Nevertheless, this was Denfeld's impression of their exchange.

Admiral Denfeld reported that "it was not clear" to him that Matthews intended at that moment to replace him.³⁹⁹ Denfeld gave a more detailed description of his impressions to Senator Knowland:

I am willing to testify before your Committee under oath that I was never given any intimation by the Secretary of the Navy or by anyone else that my services as Chief of Naval Operations would be terminated, until the day an announcement to that effect was made in the press. . . . On the contrary, when through no culpability of any one in my office, the Bogan letter discussing unification policies was released for publication, the Secretary of the Navy told me that, much as he regretted the incident, we had weathered worse storms than this before and that he and I working together would weather this one.⁴⁰⁰

On 4 October, the CNO continued with his duties as if nothing extraordinary had been said in their meeting. Denfeld claimed that his endorsement of the Bogan correspondence had been misunderstood and that he did not approve of the views

³⁹⁷Ibid.

³⁹⁸Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 63.

³⁹⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p. 2.

expressed by Captain Crommelin or Vice Admiral Bogan. He described this endorsement as a required formality and announced his continued support for unification because it is "the law of the land, the principles and objectives of which I have wholeheartedly endorsed and am striving to make effective. In this effort I am fully supported by a large majority of naval personnel."⁴⁰¹ The CNO also continued to speak of the importance of the Navy to national defense, and told the Navy Supply Corps graduates of the Harvard Business School that "as naval officers your duty to your profession entails a duty toward your fellow citizens. A duty to keep them informed of the need - - the absolute necessity - - of a Navy adequate to any emergency."⁴⁰² Secretary Johnson was aware of Denfeld's predicament and was quoted as telling "a friend, 'Denfeld hasn't been disloyal - yet.'"⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 512.

⁴⁰²Admiral Denfeld speech to the Supply Corps' graduates of the Harvard Business School in Boston, 4 October 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "Misc. Correspondence and Speeches, 1948 - 49," Naval Historical Center. It is difficult to believe that Denfeld gave this speech since he was in Secretary Matthews' office at 1615 on 4 October and the hearings commenced the next day. Regardless of its delivery, it is still a good indication of his sentiments.

⁴⁰³"Armed Forces: Facts & Fears," Time, 24 October, 1949, p. 27.

THE HEARINGS ON UNIFICATION AND STRATEGY

"I felt it was about time that the truth be known and that a spade be called a spade letting the chips fall where they may. As you know, it has been a difficult problem for me but I simply could not continue without letting the public know what was happening to the Navy and the National Security. Believe me, I shall continue to fight for what I believe is right." (18 October 1949 - Admiral Denfeld)⁴⁰⁴

"Our military forces are one team - in the game to win regardless of who carries the ball. This is no time for "fancy dans" who won't play, unless they can call the signals. Each player on this team - whether he shines in the spotlight of the backfield or eats dirt on the line - must be an all-American." (19 October 1949 - General Bradley)⁴⁰⁵

Congressman Vinson had set up the hearings on unification and strategy to permit the services' leaders to release their pent up frustrations and to serve as a catharsis for the defense establishment. His agenda ensured that the majority of issues that divided the "unified" Defense Department would at least be aired in an open forum. Passions being what they were, few observers believed that the senior officers would all survive the hearings with their careers and reputations intact. Unlike August's generally factual hearings on the B-36, this session revolved around opinions, not facts: Was the B-36 a good airplane? Did strategic bombing make sense? Did Secretary Johnson do the right thing when he canceled the "supercarrier"? Was the JCS structure working well? Vinson hoped that this public brawl would help settle the debates.

The House Armed Services Committee held hearings from 6 through 21 October 1949, averaging three and one half hours per day.⁴⁰⁶ Thirty-nine witnesses testified on the remaining six agenda items. The Navy alone sent two civilians, three Fleet Admirals, six

⁴⁰⁴Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Dudley White, Ohio newspaper publisher, 18 October 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 6, File "Correspondence - W," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁰⁵House Unification and Strategy Report, pp. 536 - 37.

⁴⁰⁶Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 514.

Admirals, and thirteen other officers to the stand. The Marines added three additional general officers to the list. In the hearings' concluding phase, former-President Hoover, Secretary Johnson, and Generals of the Army Marshall, Eisenhower, and Bradley all testified on the merits and application of military unification.⁴⁰⁷ The hearings' examination of military strategy was given added urgency by the President's 23 September announcement that the Soviet Union had tested its first atomic device, ensuring that the House's hearings on unification and strategy made front pages across the country.

Chairman Vinson understood that in order for all opinions to be freely aired, the witnesses had to be protected from reprisals, because much of the anticipated objections would be directed at the policies and actions of the leaders of the Department of Defense. Therefore, in opening the hearings on 6 October, Vinson declared:

It is the intent of the Committee that all testimony given shall be frankly and freely given and be given without reprisals in the Department of Defense against any individual presenting testimony during the course of these hearings. . . . We want these witnesses to speak what is in their minds, to put their cards on the table and to do so without hesitation or personal concern. We are going to the bottom of this unrest and concern in the Navy.⁴⁰⁸

This warning should have been unnecessary, since it was illegal either to threaten a witness before he testified to Congress or to take action against him after he made statements on the stand.⁴⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Vinson properly saw the need to reiterate what the law required.

As he had requested, Secretary Matthews led off the Navy's presentation. He had declined Admiral Denfeld's offer of help in the preparation of his statement, and, as Paul

⁴⁰⁷House Unification and Strategy Report, p. iv.

⁴⁰⁸Statement of Congressman Carl Vinson, 6 October 1949, quoted in Jurika, p. 179.

⁴⁰⁹In 1949, Title 18 of Section 1505 of the United States Criminal Code was entitled "Influencing or Injuring Witness Before Agencies and Committees." Its provisions applied in this situation.

Hammond observed, "while he did not accept Denfeld's suggestions for changing it . . . , nevertheless he continued to expect Denfeld to support his position. His refusal to take into account Denfeld's suggestions . . . [had] unfortunate consequences."⁴¹⁰ The Secretary's testimony opened with a pledge echoing Chairman Vinson's caution on reprisals. "Let me assure the Committee that any Naval officer or enlisted man or any Navy civilian whom your Committee wants to hear, or who desires to be heard by your Committee, is completely free to testify. There has been no censorship. There will be none."⁴¹¹ He went on to mention a letter which he had previously sent the Committee which addressed the six issues under discussion. After this letter was entered into the record, the Secretary launched into a heated denunciation of the "guilty" and "disloyal" conduct of a few individuals, mostly "in the Naval Aviation section of the service," who had engaged in the "indefensible procedure" of passing classified material to the press and otherwise improperly addressing their grievances.⁴¹² He stated that "the general morale of the Navy" was good and that naval officers were not "gagged" in the Defense Department but were free to express their views. These points reportedly elicited laughter from the naval officers in attendance.⁴¹³ Matthews made one final attempt to limit the hearings by requesting that some testimony, specifically Admiral Radford's statement which was to follow the Secretary's, be heard in executive session because of potential security concerns. The Committee agreed to hear the statement in executive session, but, if nothing improper was heard, the hearings would be reopened and Admiral Radford would

⁴¹⁰Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 515.

⁴¹¹"Statement of Secretary of the Navy Francis P. Matthews Before the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, 6 October 1949," p. 1, in Matthews Papers, Box 57, File "Secretary Matthews, 10/6/49," Truman Library.

⁴¹²Ibid., p. 2.

⁴¹³Ibid., p. 3, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 516.

repeat his statement. That, in fact, was the course the hearings took. Vinson was committed to airing the services' differences in public.

Matthews' testimony pleased hardly anyone. The press criticized the Secretary of the Navy for abandoning his subordinates or for allowing the hearings to be held in the first place. The Naval Academy Alumni Association's magazine, Shipmate, bluntly characterized Matthews as "a Secretary against the Navy, not for it, and certainly not of it."⁴¹⁴ Admiral Denfeld recorded that "Secretary Matthews . . . was much disturbed at press comment on his testimony."⁴¹⁵ Now the frustrated Secretary was forced to sit through eleven days of Navy and Marine officers' testimony in opposition to much of what he had just submitted.

The following days' Navy testimony attempted to build a case that the B-36 was not an adequate aircraft, that strategic nuclear bombing was immoral, inefficient, and impossible with current aircraft, and that the Department of Defense was not implementing unification in a way that recognized the rights and contributions of all four services. Admiral Radford was the first naval officer to testify. He opened this phase of the hearings with a firm denunciation of the B-36 as "a billion dollar blunder." He asserted that it was too big and slow to penetrate enemy air defenses and that naval aircraft could shoot it down unless it had fighter escort. These arguments were identical to those he had presented during his testimony before the Hoover Commission in October 1948 and to Congress during the budget hearings in early 1949.⁴¹⁶

Admiral Radford then offered his views on unification of the Armed Forces. "Unification requires a sound legislative framework, but the framework by itself will not suffice. Real unification must depend, in the ultimate, on leadership, mutual trust,

⁴¹⁴"The Navy on Capitol Hill," Shipmate, December 1949, pp. 12 -13.

⁴¹⁵Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 63.

⁴¹⁶Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," pp. 488 and 518.

understanding, and respect."⁴¹⁷ This statement was a distinct shift away from his testimony on the National Security Act of 1947, when he had said, "I feel that we are not ready for one department. I think we have to carry on for another generation and I would be hopeful that we could have, eventually, when this new generation grows up, one service."⁴¹⁸ Despite the differences, Radford still advocated trust, respect, and understanding as the keys to implementing the unification laws. In retrospect, Radford's 1947 statement was probably more accurate, since the Department of Defense continues to struggle with unification well into the 1990s. In response to questioning after his prepared statement, Admiral Radford listed the "other officers" who supported his views: "among others, Denfeld, Blandy, Conolly, Nimitz, King, and Leahy."⁴¹⁹ Denfeld now had to call Radford's bluff or stand with his fellow admirals in opposition to his civilian supervisors.

During the week of testimony before his concluding statement, Denfeld received many requests from the Secretary's office for a copy of his proposed statement, but he could not give him one because he had not yet prepared his remarks. Secretary Matthews maintained a good relationship with his CNO during this period. Denfeld's letter to Senator Knowland states that before he testified "there was an intimacy and cordiality between the Secretary of the Navy and myself which supports my conviction that what happened after October 13 was the direct result of my testimony."⁴²⁰ Both Navy leaders

⁴¹⁷Admiral Radford statement before the House Armed Services Committee, 7 October 1949, p. 2, in "The Navy and Marine Corps Presentation Before the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, United States Congress," unpublished transcript of the Naval Service testimony in the Hearings on Unification and Strategy, microfiche, October 1949. In the files of the U. S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. (Hereinafter referred to as "Navy Testimony Transcript.")

⁴¹⁸Radford's testimony to Congress, 26 June 1947, in Jurika, p. 106.

⁴¹⁹Radford's response is quoted in Coletta, The United States Navy and Defense Unification, p. 187.

⁴²⁰Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p. 1.

attended the hearings together, but tensions ran so high during the sessions that neither man appeared to be enjoying himself.

Admiral Sherman never made a statement before the Committee although he was called back from the Mediterranean to Washington to do so. Captain Fitzhugh Lee, a member of Denfeld's staff, stated that Admiral Radford left Sherman off the list of Navy witnesses because Secretary Matthews was opposed to his testifying.⁴²¹ Admiral Conolly had quite different memories of why Sherman did not testify. He recalled that Sherman had been in the Capital for about a week before the hearings and had "made out a wishy-washy statement that Denfeld and Radford rejected as compromising their position. They said it was no good at all, and they weren't going to let him testify."⁴²²

The 28 October 1949, Christian Science Monitor presented another view of Admiral Sherman's role in the controversy. It cited "Navy sources" as stating that Sherman had been ordered to Washington during the hearings at the direction of Secretary Johnson and further asserted that Johnson had recalled Sherman at the urging of Air Force generals "to have [him] testify in opposition to his brother officers in the Navy." The same sources informed the Monitor's reporter that Sherman's immediate superior, Admiral Conolly, "intimidated" him into declining to present his testimony.⁴²³ This report hardly seems credible, yet there is other evidence which strongly supports its interpretation.

The official record of the hearings on unification and strategy does not list Sherman as a witness before the Committee.⁴²⁴ The Navy's compilation of the testimony of its uniformed leaders also contains no mention of any participation by Admiral Sherman

⁴²¹Letter from Captain Fitzhugh Lee to Davis Merwin, 1 December 1949, quoted in Barlow, p. 364.

⁴²²Conolly interview, p. 405.

⁴²³"Navy 'Scuttlebutt' Brings Sherman in to Succeed Denfeld," Christian Science Monitor, 28 October 1949, p. 6.

⁴²⁴House Unification and Strategy Report, p. iv.

in the affair.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, included in Secretary Matthews' set of mimeographed copies of the Navy witnesses' statements is a seven-page "Statement of Forrest P. Sherman . . . Before the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives Investigating the B-36 and Related Matters." This piece is formatted exactly like all the other witnesses' official transcripts. Matthews' staff filed the copies in order of their presentation, and Sherman's is placed, and even dated, on the same day as Secretary Johnson's 21 October concluding presentation and one week after Admiral Denfeld concluded the Navy's presentation.⁴²⁶ Another copy of Sherman's phantom statement can be found in the Chief of Naval Operations' formerly classified "Double Zero" files in the Naval Historical Center.⁴²⁷ As described by Conolly, Sherman's statement is very balanced and not nearly as emphatic as either Admiral Radford's or Admiral Denfeld's. In it, Sherman supported unification, did not attack the B-36, continued the Navy's advocacy for a balanced military structure, and stated that morale, at least in the Mediterranean Fleet, was good. A statement along these lines could not be reconciled with the remainder of the Navy's presentation, and, if given with Secretary Johnson's testimony on the last day of the hearings, could only indicate that the Defense Secretary had found a new voice for the Navy. Drew Pearson's 31 October 1949 column even mentioned that some Navy sources were referring to Sherman as the "Quisling of the Navy" for his support of unification and Secretary Johnson.⁴²⁸

Admiral Sherman's role in the hearings, even though he never faced the microphones, was certainly greater than any historian has given him credit for. Sherman's involvement has never been fully analyzed and, if considered together with his involvement

⁴²⁵"Navy Testimony Transcript."

⁴²⁶Matthews Papers, Box 57, File "Vice Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, 10/21/49," Truman Library.

⁴²⁷Chief of Naval Operations Papers, "Double Zero Files - 1965," Box 78, File "13, B-36," Naval Historical Center.

⁴²⁸Drew Pearson, "Civilian Rule of Navy Held Basic," Washington Post, 31 October 1949, p. 1.

in the Bogan matter, reveals a new side to the character of this naval officer. Admiral Forrest Sherman has traditionally been listed among the best CNO's of the twentieth century and described as a man of great intellect and integrity, but it seems evident that the Admiral prospered from his political machinations as well as his leadership skills.

Admiral Denfeld's testimony has been called "the dramatic focus" of the hearings.⁴²⁹ Up to this point, he had remained Matthews' and Johnson's loyal subordinate, issuing his requested clarifying statement after the Bogan correspondence was published, accepting Chairman Vinson's offer to delay the hearings, and supporting the Navy Secretary's request for the testimony to be heard in executive session. Matthews hoped that Denfeld would continue along these lines and "get him off the hook" with the press.⁴³⁰ According to the New York Herald Tribune, "Louis Johnson was evidently quite free with his assurances throughout the hearings that Denfeld would repudiate his Navy colleagues and 'toe the Johnson economy line.'"⁴³¹ Despite the assurances and hopes of the civilians, Denfeld ultimately placed his career on the line by siding with his subordinates against the leadership of the Department.

The first draft of Admiral Denfeld's statement was prepared by Captain Charles Griffin, a member of the CNO's Office of Special Projects. He delivered the draft to the Admiral well before the hearings were to start, but received no feedback for several weeks. He recalled that "it soon became quite apparent to me that Admiral Denfeld was not going to take any fast action on this because he, himself, was feeling his way along."⁴³² As the CNO participated in the practice sessions for the Navy's testimony, he must have

⁴²⁹Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," pp. 527.

⁴³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 528.

⁴³¹Bert Andrews, 16 October 1949, New York Herald Tribune, p. 1.

⁴³²Interview with Charles D. Griffin, Admiral USN (Ret.) by John T. Mason, Volume I, 1970, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1973, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections, p. 187.

thought often about what effect his testimony would have on the entire case. As the final naval witness he could either torpedo the Navy's whole argument and thereby earn the enmity of his fellow naval officers, or he could lend his support to those who opposed the current implementation of unification and possibly lose his job.

The Navy's public affairs officer, Captain Walter Karig, was a close personal friend of Denfeld's. On the day after the Bogan correspondence was published and the same day the Secretary had informed the Admiral that "his usefulness as CNO" had been hurt, Captain Karig gave Denfeld the results of a cross-country morale survey his office had conducted. He concluded that "the complaint of the Navy and USNR [Reserve] personnel, freely volunteered, was that the Navy had no evidence of dynamic leadership." Karig encouraged the CNO to "grab the ball and run with it. To put it bluntly and impolitically, I think the immediate future of the Navy depends on your actions in the next couple of weeks."⁴³³ Karig's encouragement certainly added to Admiral Denfeld's internal turmoil. In his heart, Denfeld knew that many of the Navy's objections were valid, and he could not disagree with Karig's assessment that "morale in the Navy, no matter what Secretary Matthews says, is desperately low -- due entirely to the lack of internal public relations."⁴³⁴ The Navy's personnel did not understand the battles he had been through in the JCS over the past two years and the compromises he had had to make to protect as much of the Navy as he could. This was a failure of leadership - his leadership - and he must have known it. This might be his best and last opportunity to make both the Navy and the American people aware of what had been going on.

⁴³³Letter from Captain Karig to Admiral Denfeld, 4 October 1949, in the Chief of Naval Operations Papers, "Double Zero Files - 1965," Box 78, File "13, B-36," Naval Historical Center.

⁴³⁴Ibid. Another view of this disconnect between what the Navy understood and what Admiral Denfeld had been through can be found in Kenneth W. Condit, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume II, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947-1949, (Washington: The Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1978), pp. 335 - 36.

If the Admiral needed any additional urging, Air Force Secretary Symington's July 1949 speech to the Air War College would have served this purpose. "When convinced that the national interest requires a strong military position we must not permit any fear of possible criticism to deflect us from recommending that position."⁴³⁵ The CNO knew what the rest of the naval officers were going to say, and knew that whatever he said, his service was still going to be criticized. Only his personal reputation was at risk. Captain Griffin recalled that

it took an awful lot of courage for him, the nature of the man, to deliver his statement. Because it was a statement in opposition to his own Secretary. . . . He did it very courageously knowing quite well, full well, that he was laying his career on the line. But he did it.⁴³⁶

After hearing Secretary Matthews' and Admiral Radford's testimony, and at the urging of his wife and personal staff, Denfeld concluded that he was "serving the Navy ill as a would-be conciliator" and would have to take his stand during the hearings.⁴³⁷ Paul Hammond states that even Congressman Vinson called the CNO to urge him "to take a strong stand alongside his fellow naval officers."⁴³⁸

On Wednesday, 12 October, the CNO called Captain Griffin, Rear Admiral Colclough (the Navy's head lawyer), and several other staff members to his office and got them started on the revision to his draft statement. Rear Admiral Dennison, at the request of Secretary Matthews, also assisted in the process.⁴³⁹ Griffin sensed that the longer the CNO had waited to finalize his testimony, the stronger it had become, assessing that "he

⁴³⁵W. Stuart Symington, "Our Air Force Policy," Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 July 1949, p. 567.

⁴³⁶Griffin interview, p. 193.

⁴³⁷Barlow, p. 252, "Armed Forces: Facts & Fears," Time, 24 October, 1949, p. 27, and Potter, Burke, p. 325.

⁴³⁸Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 528.

⁴³⁹Griffin interview, p. 189 and Dennison interview, p. 201.

came under the influence of people such as Radford, Burke, and myself."⁴⁴⁰ The team worked deep into the night, with the final page coming off the typewriter at three in the morning. The Admiral did not finish his corrections and additions until eleven o'clock on the thirteenth, only two hours before he was to deliver his testimony.⁴⁴¹ Therefore he was unable to get a copy to the Secretary before he left the Pentagon to go to the hearings, ultimately adding to the Secretary's shock at Denfeld's presentation.

The most profound of the changes made by Admiral Denfeld on the morning of his testimony was the addition of an opening statement noting his agreement with the conclusions of the naval and marine officers who preceded him.⁴⁴² With this statement, the Admiral assumed personal accountability for the words and actions of his subordinates. This seems to have been a very conscious decision on his part to try to lead the Navy at the risk of appearing to follow it. Of course, this choice was difficult, and the CNO appears to have had some second thoughts about being held responsible for all the claims made by naval officers in the hearings. In his verbal presentation of his written statement he changed its opening from "I fully support the conclusions presented . . ." to "I fully support the *broad* conclusions presented . . ." (emphasis added) Paul Hammond notes that this limitation was generally lost on the public, and was "vague" and "feeble."⁴⁴³ Still, it demonstrates that Denfeld continued to be torn between two loyalties.

Denfeld's lengthy statement was a measured and reasonable summary of the Navy's case, concentrating on the areas in which the CNO could add his own experience and expertise. He did not attack the B-36 or describe the merits of the flush-deck carrier as

⁴⁴⁰Griffin interview, p. 193.

⁴⁴¹Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 63 and Griffin interview, p. 190.

⁴⁴²Dennison interview, p. 201.

⁴⁴³The original language is found in the statement's transcript in the Matthews Papers and in the Navy's compilation of the testimony. The minutes of the hearings record the actual testimony before the Committee. Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 528.

these subjects had already been covered by the experts brought in for just this purpose. Denfeld's testimony focused on unification and the integration of the Navy and naval views into the Defense Department's decision-making groups. On some topics he disagreed with some of the aviators, but generally he took his place at the head of the "revolting admirals."

Following his introductory statement, the CNO tried to clarify the intent of his testimony, claiming that his words were based on concern for national security rather than the parochial interests of his service or his career. He stated that the Navy understood the need for economy in defense spending and did not want more money but only the freedom to spend what was allocated to it. This point was in reference to the cancellation of the United States, where Denfeld believed the Navy should have been allowed to reprioritize among its funded programs to build the best weapons possible to meet its assigned missions. He had consistently objected to the JCS or the Defense Secretary "arbitrarily" intruding into the Navy's weapons programs. Denfeld went on to describe "true unification" as "essential," and to assert that the Navy fully supported military unification in concept and law.⁴⁴⁴ In a rare point of agreement with Secretary Matthews, the CNO described morale as "high, if by morale you mean enthusiastic loyalty to the nation and the service; in other words, the fighting spirit." But his assessment went on to describe a "deep apprehension" about the ability of the Navy to carry out its mission with the available resources and within the current defense organization. Denfeld stated that naval officers were genuinely concerned about the ability of the Navy to defend the United States in a future conflict.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴Admiral Denfeld's statement, in the Matthews Papers, Box 57, File "Admiral Denfeld, 10/13/49," Truman Library, pp. 1 - 3.

⁴⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 4 - 7.

Regarding strategic bombing and the Air Force's capabilities, Admiral Denfeld echoed the distinction made by Radford between "strategic bombing," which was long-range, high altitude, low accuracy attacks, and "strategic air warfare," which was precisely targeted and delivered attacks on targets of strategic value. The CNO strongly advocated strategic air warfare as a more effective option and pointed out that naval forces, striking from the sea, had an important contribution to make to this type of campaign. He did not distinguish between nuclear and conventional attacks, but reiterated his support for the evaluations being done by the Weapons System Evaluation Group to determine the effect of an atomic attack and the ability of the Nation's existing assets to deliver the bomb accurately and reliably. Regarding the B-36, the Admiral did not pass judgment on the aircraft, but firmly stated that it was "illogical, damaging, and dangerous" for anyone to move this aircraft beyond the developmental stage without a full evaluation of its capabilities to perform its mission. A poor investment made in the production of such an untried aircraft could starve the Army and Navy of funds needed for proven weapons systems for little return on investment.⁴⁴⁶

Regarding his own service, the CNO justified the need for a Navy to "exert the steady, unrelenting pressure . . . against the homeland of an enemy" regardless of his naval capabilities. "Fleets never in history met opposing fleets for any purpose other than to gain control of the sea - not as an end in itself, but so that national power could be exerted against the enemy."⁴⁴⁷ The Admiral went on to describe the essential place a balanced force including aircraft carriers and submarines played in implementing this concept of naval power. Additionally, the development of amphibious tactics by the Navy and

⁴⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 7 - 10.

⁴⁴⁷Ibid., p. 11. This clear and perceptive observation today serves as the basis for the Navy's concept of warfare, "From the Sea . . . "

Marine Corps team was supported, and he asserted that the Nation must maintain a "combined arms" Marine Corps.⁴⁴⁸

Turning to the administration of unification, the Admiral continued directly to attack the procedures and policies of the Defense Department which he believed did not improve national security. In the most widely quoted part of his testimony, Denfeld asserted that the Navy was not being treated as a full partner in the unified defense establishment. He pointed to the procurement of B-36s during 1949 as a good example of how the JCS was not uniformly managing the Defense Department's expenditures. While the JCS was allowed to vote to cancel the U. S. S. United States, twice during the year the Air Force ordered additional B-36s, doubling their number to 170 and diverting millions from other defense programs while the CNO "was under the impression that the Air Force planned to cut back the B-36 program."⁴⁴⁹ The CNO used this issue and the cancellation of the flush-deck carrier to reiterate his proposal that each service be allowed to manage its own allotted funds in weapons development with the understanding that no weapons systems would go into full production without the JCS' approval.

Admiral Denfeld wrapped up his statement by reiterating that the Navy aimed first and foremost to improve national defense. Unification was a good concept that was not being properly implemented. "Improper operation of unification is more injurious than no unification at all."⁴⁵⁰ The CNO next ventured his opinion on the hearings themselves:

I can understand the view that it is regrettable the basic differences revealed in these hearings have been aired in public. I believe, however, it would have been immeasurably more regrettable had these issues remained hidden and a false sense of security been permitted to prevail.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 18 - 21.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁵⁰Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁵¹Ibid., p. 39.

To overcome many of the problems identified in his testimony, the Admiral proposed six specific actions for the consideration of the Defense Department's leaders. These included allowing the Weapons System Evaluation Group to do its job by evaluating the B-36 before additional aircraft were procured. He also advocated following the National Security Act and the Key West Agreement literally rather than continuously pursuing changes while the cement of the Pentagon's foundations was still drying. Perhaps his key recommendation was to ensure that "the views of a particular service are entitled to predominant weight in the determination of the forces needed by that service to fulfill its missions."⁴⁵² This returned everyone's attention to the conflict over the desirability of the "supercarrier" as opposed to the B-36, the former having been scuttled while the latter flourished and multiplied.

Denfeld has not been given sufficient credit for the tolerance and factual accuracy of his address. He laid out the Navy's complaints without assigning blame and without proposing any solutions not based on the best interests of the United States. Unfortunately, the focus of public attention was on his opening statement by which he supported the conclusions of his subordinates. Denfeld had joined the rebels! Nonetheless, much of his testimony, in fact, echoed statements he had made in Congress during the budget debates of the past two years. It was no secret that he objected to the carrier's cancellation and to the "arbitrary" reductions in the Navy's allocated funds. At least within the JCS it was also well known that he opposed the concentration on strategic bombing and the build up of B-36s. Congressman Vinson praised the CNO's statement: "Admiral Denfeld, in my judgment you have rendered a great service to the nation by

⁴⁵²Ibid., p. 42.

making this statement." The Minority Leader, Dewey Short, also complimented the Admiral:

"Amen" to your magnificent statement. . . . I personally appreciate the frankness and courage that you have exhibited here. It is something that needed to be said and it was forcefully and beautifully said.⁴⁵³

Paul Hammond also gives the CNO credit for his "underlying tone of self restraint" and "real moderation," yet he is in the large minority.⁴⁵⁴

Secretary Matthews, having had no advance warning that Denfeld was going to side with his admirals rather than his civilian superiors, left the session "visibly flushed" without speaking to the CNO. Captain Griffin observed that "the Secretary of the Navy was just wild."⁴⁵⁵ Later that day, when newsmen asked the President to comment on Denfeld's statements about unification, Truman offered "no comment."⁴⁵⁶ The Washington Post concentrated on Denfeld's opening: "by supporting fully all the conclusions in Navy testimony before the House, Admiral Denfeld assumes responsibility for statements a good deal more rash than those he himself makes."⁴⁵⁷ The Washington newsmen Robert Allen and William Shannon claimed that "Denfeld, trapped in his own tortuous game of pussyfooting, won the resounding applause of his nominal subordinates. But that is all he won."⁴⁵⁸ Air Force Magazine wrote that Denfeld had "rebuffed higher authority and by his actions encouraged insubordination within his command."⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵³Congressman Vinson's and Congressman Short's statements are quoted in Jurika, p. 206.

⁴⁵⁴Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 528.

⁴⁵⁵Griffin interview, p. 191.

⁴⁵⁶President Truman's 13 October 1949 news conference, in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1949, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 231.

⁴⁵⁷"Navy: Summing Up," Washington Post, 17 October 1949.

⁴⁵⁸Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, The Truman MERRY-GO-ROUND, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), p. 457.

⁴⁵⁹"Revolt of the Admirals," Air Force, December 1949, p. 22.

In fact, what the Admiral had done was to make the Navy *his command* again. No longer would he remain aloof, attempting to compromise and bargain behind the scenes. He had elected to take a firm stand, accept responsibility for his service, and assume the leadership position he was assigned to hold. The only question was how long he would be allowed to keep his hold on the reins.

On the day after Denfeld spoke, Secretary Matthews told him that he had been "stunned" by the CNO's testimony. Denfeld concluded that Matthews would have rather had him dissociate his views from the other witnesses and "submerge what he knew from my expressions were my true opinions."⁴⁶⁰ Time magazine wrote that "one thing seemed already clear at the end of Denfeld's testimony: either he or Louis Johnson would have to step aside: after Denfeld's testimony they could no longer work together."⁴⁶¹ Matthews had continued to meet with Admirals Conolly and Sherman during the hearings, often for over an hour at a time.⁴⁶² He had several options, but in the charged Washington atmosphere, any decision would be fraught with danger.

The CNO's testimony concluded the Navy's presentation. Now it was the turn of the other JCS members and the leadership of the Defense Department to answer the Navy's charges. Just as they had done during the initial hearings in August, Secretary Symington and General Vandenberg presented a well organized and persuasive explanation of the Air Force's views on the B-36, strategic bombing, and unification. They then went on to charge that the Navy's airing of technical details of the B-36 had been injurious to national security. Symington thus placed himself in opposition to the admirals in taking this "completely uncompromising position."⁴⁶³ Much of the Navy's

⁴⁶⁰Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 63.

⁴⁶¹"Armed Forces: Facts & Fears," Time, 24 October, 1949, p. 27.

⁴⁶²Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 10 - 14 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁴⁶³Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 532.

argument was refuted in these statements, particularly those aspects of the case which attacked the efficacy of strategic bombing based on documents of dubious authenticity such as "The Strategic Bombing Myth," a pamphlet which had been entered into the record by Navy witnesses.

Following the Air Force's devastating rebuttal, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General of the Army Omar Bradley, took the stand. Bradley had close ties to the Air Force and had been viewed as a "sworn enemy" of the Navy following the debates over the fiscal year 1950 budget and the decision to cancel the flush-deck carrier.⁴⁶⁴ General Vandenberg, the Air Force Chief, had provided close air support for Bradley's troops during the World War II European campaigns, and the two continued to function well as a team. Bradley had moved reluctantly from Army Chief of Staff to CJCS in mid-1949, deciding to accept the new position only out of "deep concern about the state of the military establishment." He believed that he could serve as a "moderating force" in the JCS and "prevent a crippling brawl." Despite these good intentions, he had been ineffective in this undertaking, and his testimony now proved that he was hardly a "moderating force."⁴⁶⁵

As the hearings progressed, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs became more and more frustrated with the Navy's presentation. He then came to view the naval aviators as "insubordinate and mutinous crybabies." Bradley's autobiography records his disenchantment at the Navy's criticism of Air Force strategic bombing at a time when the admirals were attempting to justify the development of their own capability to deliver atomic strikes:

⁴⁶⁴Bradley and Blair, p. 496.

⁴⁶⁵Ibid., p. 505.

I was profoundly shocked and angered by the Navy's case. The main thrust of it was dishonest. . . . For the Navy to raise public doubt about the effectiveness - or morality - of atomic bombs was the height of hypocrisy.⁴⁶⁶

The General also objected to Denfeld's attack on JCS procedures and modified his testimony to respond to the CNO's broadsides.⁴⁶⁷ He felt that "no one had publicly censured them [the admirals] for the insubordination, and it did not seem like anyone would. I therefore took it upon myself to administer the lash."⁴⁶⁸ This attack was merely the first of many spears to be thrown in Admiral Denfeld's direction now that he had publicly sided with the Navy's rebels.

In his very forthright and direct statement, General Bradley placed the blame for the Navy's low morale squarely on the shoulders of Denfeld and the other admirals who had not adequately explained to their subordinates the Navy's evolving role in national defense: "The *esprit* of the men is but a mirror of their confidence in their leadership."⁴⁶⁹ He went on to present his famous football analogy comparing the Navy's leaders to "fancy dans who won't play, unless they can call the signals."⁴⁷⁰ The national defense organization had evolved from what then-Senator Truman saw in 1944 as "not one team and one huddle, but *two* teams and *two* huddles," to one team without any unity in 1949.⁴⁷¹ Although the transition to one, fully integrated team had not yet been completed, it is difficult to understand why Bradley felt that publicly "administering the lash" was the best way to build teamwork.

⁴⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 508 - 10.

⁴⁶⁷Barlow, p. 262. Captain Edward Beach, the author of *Run Silent, Run Deep*, was serving as General Bradley's naval aide at this time. He recalled that General Bradley put more effort into his speeches than most other senior officers, and that this presentation was wholly his own creation. Captain Beach was not given a copy of the General's speech until the morning of Bradley's testimony, and was therefore unable to warn the General about some of the inflammatory passages in his address.

⁴⁶⁸Bradley and Blair, p. 510.

⁴⁶⁹Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 533, and Bradley and Blair, p. 511.

⁴⁷⁰House Unification and Strategy Report, pp. 536 - 37.

⁴⁷¹Truman, "Our Armed Forces MUST be Unified," p. 16.

The reaction to this latest salvo in the inter-service wars was quick and dramatic. The Washington Post wrote that "the top-ranking officer of the armed services accused the admirals, in effect, of being prima donnas and sore heads."⁴⁷² Truman's biographer Richard Haynes saw Bradley's "attack on the Navy" as "ill-tempered, not entirely fair, and certainly ill-advised."⁴⁷³ The Navy's OP-23 recorded in its 1950 history of the investigation that this statement created a clear impression that "somebody in the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to go."⁴⁷⁴

Retired Admiral Standley transmitted his view of the Chairman of the JCS' testimony in a 25 October 1949 letter to Congressman Vinson:

To use the expression "fancy dans" in referring to officers who have given their lives to the service and are willing to jeopardize their career in giving their honest opinion in regard to matters of national security is wholly out of place and unbecoming to a man who occupies the position of chief of staff of the national defense forces.⁴⁷⁵

Admiral Denfeld objected strongly to some particular items in the General's tongue lashing, but was less bristling in his reaction, writing "I do not question that General Bradley tries to be fair but he remains an Army officer with a one-service background and viewpoint."⁴⁷⁶ To Chairman Vinson's dismay, the inter-service battle lines had firmed up rather than becoming blurred in the hearings.

The Congressional hearings on unification and strategy ended with a fizzle on 21 October 1949. Secretary Johnson and former-President Hoover presented very low key

⁴⁷²John G. Norris, "Service Chiefs' Chairman Assails Top Admirals for Hurting Defense," Washington Post, 20 October 1949, p. 1.

⁴⁷³Haynes, p. 30.

⁴⁷⁴"A History of the Investigation of the B-36," p. 38, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "B-36 Investigation," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁷⁵Letter from Admiral W. H. Standley, USN (Ret.) to Representative Carl Vinson, 25 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - V," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁷⁶Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," Collier's, 25 March 1950, p. 46.

and non-confrontational statements. Johnson, who certainly could have provided some heated exchanges with the Congressional Committee, at times harshly criticized the Navy's characterization of JCS procedures and current battle plans, but he made few inflammatory statements or accusations to fill the next day's headlines. E. B. Potter wrote that Johnson had spoken in a "lofty" and "conciliatory" manner because he felt he had already won and should therefore appear statesmanlike to the press.⁴⁷⁷ President Hoover praised the witnesses who had testified before the Committee, calling them "great public servants." He noted that "they are all moved by earnest and even emotional interest in our national defense."⁴⁷⁸

The Navy had tried to convince Congress and the American people that maintaining a strong Navy was of vital importance to national security. The sincerity and conviction of the admirals came across clearly, but the service's divisions and confused priorities also became very evident. Admiral Radford had tried to argue that the Air Force was not capable of conducting a strategic bombing campaign, all the while suggesting that the Navy could accomplish the same mission with carrier-borne bombers. This contradictory assertion gave the entire case a hypocritical appearance and helped the sea service's opponents. The internal differences between Secretary Matthews and Admiral Denfeld lent an air of personal drama to the hearings which also detracted from the Navy's ability to get its message across. The hearings on unification and strategy did little to help the Navy in the near term, certainly damaged the service's reputation, and pointed out the need for a change in leadership.

⁴⁷⁷Potter, Burke, p. 326.

⁴⁷⁸President Hoover's testimony is quoted in the House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 9.

LOUIS DENFELD GETS "THE AX"

"I feel sure that I have made bitter enemies of Johnson, Symington, and Matthews, and that a purge will be in order unless I have the complete backing of the Congress and the people." (18 October 1949 - Admiral Denfeld)⁴⁷⁹

"A military establishment is not a political democracy. Integrity of command is indispensable at all times. There can be no twilight zone in the measure of loyalty to superiors and respect for authority existing between various official ranks. Inability to conform to such requirements for military stability would disqualify any of us for positions subordinate to the Commander in Chief." (27 October 1949 - Secretary Matthews)⁴⁸⁰

After so many fireworks, it seemed unusual that the hearings ended on such a quiet note. Jeffrey Barlow has speculated that Johnson escaped the usually aggressive cross examination from pro-Navy Congressmen by reaching a secret agreement in a meeting with Vinson and other Committee members the night before his testimony. Johnson was accompanied by Matthews, Symington, Admiral Denfeld and General Vandenberg at this session, where Barlow believes they worked with Vinson to end the hearings as soon as possible.⁴⁸¹ There is no transcript of this meeting, but this interpretation seems plausible. The cards were already on the table. Congress would have many more opportunities to assail Johnson's economy programs. Now was the time to start healing the wounds and addressing the problems which had been identified in the three weeks of testimony.

Admiral Denfeld's testimony had offered six steps to take following the hearings, but there was no consensus on any course of action after this prolonged public battle. OP-23's history stated that "the B-36 hearings closed in an atmosphere of uncertainty with

⁴⁷⁹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Dudley White, 18 October 1949, in Denfeld Papers, Box 6, File "Correspondence - W," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁸⁰Letter from Secretary Matthews to President Truman, 27 October 1949, in Harry S. Truman, Official Files, File "Navy, 1949," Truman Library.

⁴⁸¹Barlow, p. 363.

everyone wondering 'Where do we go from here?'"⁴⁸² Defense Secretary Johnson had some definite ideas which he transmitted to the service secretaries on Monday, 24 October:

There must be no 'reprisals' as a result of the hearings. We must, of course, continue to follow the policy of 'selecting the best man for the job,' but no one is to be punished for any testimony that he may have given in the past, or that he may give in the future, before a Congressional Committee. This is not to say, of course, that there will not be some changes in assignments within the Department of Defense. Such changes will occur continuously, whenever any individuals show themselves to lack the qualifications for jobs to which they have been assigned, and as other individuals show themselves to possess the necessary qualifications.⁴⁸³

The warning against reprisals was needed, because Johnson knew the Committee would react strongly to any indication that its ability to obtain trustworthy testimony from military personnel was being hindered. Chairman Vinson had made himself very clear on that point. Johnson's letter is therefore worth reading carefully because it provides the rationale he wanted the Secretaries to use if they wished to "change any assignments" following the hearings.

In Admiral Denfeld's case, it must be remembered that before the hearings began Matthews had told the CNO that his usefulness had been hindered by the release of the Bogan correspondence and the poor administrative practices revealed by that episode. Johnson had been present on 5 October when the Navy Secretary mentioned this matter to the President and understood it provided a plausible excuse to "change" the CNO's assignment, even if it was Denfeld's testimony which ultimately precipitated his removal.

⁴⁸²"A History of the Investigation of the B-36," p. 39, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "B-36 Investigation," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁸³Letter from Secretary Johnson to the Service Secretaries, 24 October 1949, in Louis A. Johnson, Statements and Speeches of Louis A. Johnson, Secretary of Defense March 29, 1949 - September 12, 1950, vol. II, p. 517, unpublished mimeographs, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historian, Washington.

Johnson and Matthews understood Congress' aversion to reprisals against witnesses and had already developed a strategy to work around this objection if they decided to fire Admiral Denfeld.

Following the conclusion of the bitter hearings, Secretary Johnson set up a "friendly golf match" between the members of the JCS to permit them to "shake hands and forget" the bitterness. Reportedly a pleasant atmosphere prevailed among the Service Chiefs and, true to form, Air Force Generals Vandenberg and Norstadt won the two dollar golfing prize.⁴⁸⁴ The generals and the admirals had proven they could still play together, but could they work together following the public bickering?

Admiral Denfeld understood his precarious position, both on and off the golf course. His service had "lost" the hearings, and he was at odds with his civilian leader. Captain Holden, a reserve lawyer, wrote the CNO on 25 October to explain that he was "working for you [Denfeld] through my political contacts."⁴⁸⁵ Denfeld was grateful, definitely recognizing that he needed the help:

I appreciate so much what you are doing and know you will continue to carry the banner for me. We cannot let anything happen to any of the people participating in the recent hearings because frankly the Navy and its associates are hanging in the balance. . . . The situation at the moment is quite delicate. I can't tell just what will happen. You may rest assured that with the exception of one or two, the navy is completely united.⁴⁸⁶

Although the CNO did not identify the "one or two" he believed were not united behind his banner, Vice Admiral Sherman was surely one of the naval officers Denfeld saw as

⁴⁸⁴Phillip S. Meilinger, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, "The Admirals' Revolt of 1949: Lessons for Today," Parameters, September 1989, p. 95.

⁴⁸⁵Letter from Captain Edward Holden, Jr., USNR to Admiral Denfeld, 25 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Correspondence - H," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁸⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Captain Edward Holden, Jr., USNR, 26 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Correspondence - H," Naval Historical Center.

taking a different course. Sherman had gone back to his fleet in the Mediterranean but was on the CNO's mind during this tense period.⁴⁸⁷ Denfeld certainly had the time to speculate on the possibilities, since he was practically shunned by Matthews following his testimony, only spending a total of 52 minutes with the Secretary between 21 and 28 October.⁴⁸⁸

Many sources reported that rumors of the CNO's impending removal were circulating in Washington during the weeks following his testimony and the end of the hearings. The Christian Science Monitor noted that these rumblings were "originating in Pentagon corridors adjacent to Defense Secretary Louis A. Johnson's office."⁴⁸⁹ The Washington Star's John Giles attributed a statement placing Denfeld's removal in the near future to "one high official in the Pentagon," and interviewed Denfeld's aides who insisted that the Admiral had no intention of stepping down voluntarily and was unaware of any plans to fire him.⁴⁹⁰ OP-23's history of the investigation noted that "it looked as if the Administration were sending up trial ballons [sic] to test public sentiment about the Navy and particularly about Admiral Denfeld."⁴⁹¹ The 22 October Omaha World Herald even went as far as to predict that Forrest Sherman would be Denfeld's successor.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁷Barlow cites Lieutenant Commander Frank Manson, one of the CNO's personal staff assistants, as remembering Denfeld being "incensed" at Sherman's presence in Washington during the hearings. Manson felt that Denfeld "had a pretty good notion of what the call [Sherman's visit] was all about." (p. 271.)

⁴⁸⁸Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 21 - 28 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁴⁸⁹"Navy 'Scuttlebutt' Brings Sherman in to Succeed Denfeld," Christian Science Monitor, 28 October 1949, p. 6.

⁴⁹⁰John A. Giles, "Friends Insist Denfeld Won't Step Out of His Post Voluntarily," Washington Star, 23 October 1949, p. 1.

⁴⁹¹"A History of the Investigation of the B-36," p. 39, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "B-36 Investigation," Naval Historical Center.

⁴⁹²Omaha World Herald, 22 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

The CNO recognized that his position was tenuous, but even after testifying in opposition to Matthews, Denfeld did not believe that he would be fired.⁴⁹³ After all, he had just been nominated and confirmed for a second term beginning in December. He had many influential friends on Capitol Hill, and the Committee's warnings against reprisals seemed to provide him with some job security. The politically astute Admiral hoped that the Republicans would not make the Navy's case into a partisan issue. In an 18 October letter to Dudley White, Denfeld wrote that bipartisan Congressional support would be needed to protect the Navy from the civilian leadership of the Defense Department.⁴⁹⁴ The CNO was riding out the storm while awaiting the report of the House hearings. This report, due to come out after the Congressional winter recess, would determine if his testimony had been effective and would guide his future strategy for the protection of his service's and the Nation's interests.

Denfeld hoped that he would be allowed to continue to advocate the Navy's interests as Chief of Naval Operations. In his letter to Dudley White, the Admiral commented on the possible "purge" which might be made of the Navy's radicals: "I don't mind the purge, but I think for the good of the country, it would be well for me to continue on no matter how difficult it is for me personally. My opponents will do a lot of dirty infighting I know, but I have got to be prepared for that."⁴⁹⁵ During the hearings Denfeld had finally made the decision to lead his service by forcefully endorsing the majority opinion of his fellow officers, and now he wanted to continue at the head of the Navy team.

⁴⁹³Griffin interview, p. 194, and Barlow, p. 269.

⁴⁹⁴Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Dudley White, 18 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 3, File "Correspondence - H," Naval History Center.

⁴⁹⁵Ibid.

Secretary Matthews was of exactly the opposite mind during this period. He thought that the senior naval officers had gotten out of control and that he needed to reassert his authority. On Friday, 14 October, the day after Denfeld's shocking statement, Matthews called Admiral Nimitz in New York "in urgent need of advice."⁴⁹⁶ The Secretary agreed to meet the retired Fleet Admiral the next day in New York to escape controversy-filled Washington in order to discuss the state of the Navy's leadership.

Nimitz's account of this meeting, as told by E. B. Potter in the Admiral's biography, is very detailed, yet hardly believable in its depiction of the Secretary. Matthews was an experienced lawyer who had firmly allied himself with Secretary Johnson and President Truman during the hearings. He was in a strong position, even though his subordinates had disagreed with his views during the hearings. Nimitz recalled that Matthews was "in a state of agitation" and that "he said he felt himself to be the victim of a conspiracy, with Denfeld the principal conspirator."⁴⁹⁷ Continuing this portrayal of Matthews as an incompetent weakling, Nimitz quoted the Secretary's complaint that "Denfeld never tells me anything. Is that right?" Nimitz indicated his reply was conditioned by his desire

not to appear critical of Denfeld whom he liked, but in all honesty, he had to admit that the Chief of Naval Operations had no business concealing facts about the Navy from the Secretary. "When I was CNO," said Nimitz, "I reported to Mr. Forrestal every morning."⁴⁹⁸

Admiral Denfeld was certainly guilty of not keeping the Secretary informed of his intentions regarding his testimony, but considering that he had not made his final decision until the night before his statement, there were mitigating circumstances. The CNO and

⁴⁹⁶Potter, Nimitz, p. 446.

⁴⁹⁷Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸Ibid.

the Secretary were together on many occasions during the first week of the hearings and must have discussed the ongoing testimony and Denfeld's indecision on his own statement, but the record is silent on this point.⁴⁹⁹ The papers of Secretaries Sullivan and Matthews indicate that Denfeld routinely met with his civilian supervisors and shared as much as possible of his concerns with the two Secretaries. This relationship must be contrasted with the oft-repeated story from Nimitz's tenure that Secretary Forrestal had to resort to walking to the Navy's communications room himself to look at messages the admirals had screened from him.

E. B. Potter's biography of Nimitz provides additional material on Nimitz's impression of Secretary Matthews:

[Nimitz] seems to have felt pity for this well-meaning but confused man who was caught between his duty to support the Navy and loyalty to his friend and patron, Secretary Johnson. The extent of Matthews' unfamiliarity with naval matters was revealed by his final question: "How can I get rid of Denfeld? It seemed impossible for a man to be Secretary of the Navy for six months and not know the answer to that elementary question. Nimitz patiently explained. . . . He told Matthews that if he really believed he could not work with Admiral Denfeld, he should write to Mr. Truman, asking that Denfeld be transferred to some other duty, and stating the reasons for the request. He pointed out, however, that Matthews should not list among his reasons Denfeld's statements before the Vinson Committee, since all officials had been guaranteed against reprisals for their testimony."⁵⁰⁰

In fact, the removal of Admiral Denfeld had been discussed with Secretary Johnson and the President on 5 October, and the Secretary's own testimony had made it clear he understood the reprisal problem.

⁴⁹⁹Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 4 - 13 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library. Neither Matthews' later press conferences nor Denfeld's articles in Collier's mention whether or not Denfeld's options were discussed with the Secretary prior to 13 October. But, given their frequent meetings during the early part of October, it would have been very difficult for them to have avoided this topic.

⁵⁰⁰Potter, Nimitz, p. 447.

Potter's account, although certainly putting the subject of his book in a good light, can not be substantiated in either the tone or substance of this characterization of the Secretary. It is true that Matthews met with the ex-CNO in New York to discuss the removal of Denfeld.⁵⁰¹ But Nimitz was known to be friendly with Denfeld and had worked with him for years. There is no reason to believe that the normally level-headed Matthews would put himself in such an awkward and vulnerable position with Nimitz unless there was another reason for the meeting. If he needed advice on how to fire Admiral Denfeld, Secretary Johnson would have been a much more available and suitable source. Jeffrey Barlow agrees that it is not plausible to suggest that Nimitz would have needed to remind the lawyer Matthews of Vinson's warning against reprisals.⁵⁰²

A more plausible reason for this meeting between the Navy's beleaguered Secretary and retired Fleet Admiral Nimitz was the fact that Nimitz was reportedly one of the few naval officers Truman trusted.⁵⁰³ Nimitz's statement during the hearings had been calm and reasonable, and his proven abilities could certainly help Matthews restore order in the service if he could be persuaded to follow Matthews' and Johnson's lead. It certainly seems plausible that the President, in the 5 October meeting, may have suggested bringing back the ex-CNO to restore order if Denfeld needed to be relieved following the hearings. Matthews may have been on a mission to sound out Nimitz about this possibility. In fact, Potter's book notes that Truman did call Nimitz and offer him the CNO position after Denfeld's removal was announced.⁵⁰⁴ Francis Matthews may have

⁵⁰¹Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 13 - 15 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library, and letter from Admiral Nimitz to Father Maurice Sheehy, 13 February 1950, cited in Barlow, p. 364. In this letter, Nimitz reports that Matthews told him about his 4 October meeting with the CNO and his decision to remove Denfeld based on the Bogan incident.

⁵⁰²Barlow, p. 364.

⁵⁰³Potter, Burke, p. 327, and Nimitz, p. 420.

⁵⁰⁴Potter, Nimitz, p. 447.

been unfamiliar with the Navy, but he was far from the confused weakling portrayed by Potter.

Secretary Johnson was certainly also deeply involved in the decision whether or not to retain Denfeld as CNO. Paolo Coletta asserts that Denfeld's endorsement to the Bogan letter had made Johnson so "furious" that he instructed Matthews to keep the CNO in line or he would cancel Denfeld's reappointment. Coletta goes on to postulate that this warning prompted the Navy Secretary to court Admiral Conolly and then Vice Admiral Sherman as potential replacements during the hearings.⁵⁰⁵ General Eisenhower's papers also attest to Johnson's anger at Denfeld's actions. A transcript of a telephone conversation between Johnson and Eisenhower on 18 October 1949 records that Johnson asked for Eisenhower's help in opposing Denfeld (Eisenhower was scheduled to testify on 20 October). Johnson declared that the CNO's testimony had been "an attack against the President and civilian control and economy, [and that the admirals] have really gone below the belt this time."⁵⁰⁶

Johnson's 24 October letter to the Service Secretaries lays out his initial plans for a "constructive program" to enable the Department to "go forward promptly and speedily with the strengthening of our military team" following the hearings. He noted that "some people have described the task we now face as one of 'picking up the pieces.' I do not so regard it."⁵⁰⁷ Johnson intended to carry on with business as usual by not altering his basic plans while adjusting his tactics to accommodate the new lessons learned from the hearings. These plans included promises that no reprisals would be made, that the

⁵⁰⁵Paolo Coletta, "Louis E. Denfeld," in Robert W. Love, Jr., ed., The Chiefs of Naval Operations, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980), p. 201.

⁵⁰⁶Barlow, p. 255.

⁵⁰⁷Letter from Secretary Johnson to the Service Secretaries, 24 October 1949, in Louis A. Johnson, Statements and Speeches of Louis A. Johnson, Secretary of Defense March 29, 1949 - September 12, 1950, Vol. II, unpublished mimeograph, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historian, Washington.

Department should improve its overall relationship with Congress, and that the services should adhere to the current distribution of roles and missions. In other areas, he stated that "my own views as to the steps we should take are by no means definitive as yet."⁵⁰⁸ But, concerning the future of Admiral Denfeld, he already appears to have made his decision.

Regardless of his stated position on reprisals, it seems clear that Johnson had already made up his mind to remove Denfeld by the end of the hearings and was only waiting for Congress to recess and the Presidential approval to be processed before making the decision public. Robert Love and Jeffrey Barlow note that Drew Pearson's diaries record a 20 October meeting with Johnson where the Secretary stated "categorically that Denfeld will be kicked out and replaced by Forrest Sherman."⁵⁰⁹ This private comment to a member of the media was made even before the hearings were completed. Truman's Naval Aide, Rear Admiral Dennison, felt that Matthews made the "arbitrary" decision to remove the CNO "probably with the concurrence of Johnson and maybe more than concurrence."⁵¹⁰ Given Johnson's aggressive character and record, and the solid relationship between Matthews and the Secretary of Defense, it is inconceivable that Matthews made a unilateral decision to remove the CNO and that the Secretary of Defense had to be persuaded to take this course. Johnson's only concern was to avoid any political opposition if he appeared to violate his pledge against reprisals.

Secretaries Matthews and Johnson met with the President on Tuesday, 25 October to present their recommendation regarding Admiral Denfeld's future as CNO. The President later disclosed that the final decision to transfer Denfeld to other duties was

⁵⁰⁸Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹Barlow, p. 272, and Robert W. Love, Jr., History of the U. S. Navy, 1942-1991, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1992), p. 332.

⁵¹⁰Dennison interview, p. 200.

made at this meeting.⁵¹¹ The only thing left to do was to process the paperwork. The chosen mechanism was to have Secretary Matthews send through Johnson to the President a letter requesting Presidential approval to transfer the CNO. This procedure placed the primary responsibility for the decision on Matthews rather than the politically ambitious Johnson. It also allowed the Navy Secretary to document his rationale for the transfer rather than letting the press and Congress draw the obvious conclusion that the action was a reprisal. The three officials understood that the decision would be seen as a reprisal regardless of their stated rationale, so Johnson called Senator Tydings, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to notify him of the pending transfer and to obtain his concurrence before announcing the decision. Meanwhile, Secretary Matthews spent most of Wednesday, 26 October at home, presumably drafting his letter to the President.⁵¹²

Secretary Matthews' 27 October 1949 submission to the President was a carefully crafted letter which never mentioned the CNO's testimony or any specific deficiencies as causing his removal.⁵¹³ It hinted that Denfeld was not fully supportive of unification, but never explained the details of his opposition. Matthews included a brief description of the 4 October meeting with the CNO where he had "frankly stated to him that I feared his usefulness as Chief of Naval Operations had terminated." It also noted for the record that "the possibility of Admiral Denfeld's replacement" had been discussed with the President and the Secretary of Defense on 5 October.⁵¹⁴ Once again, no details of this discussion are provided.

⁵¹¹Omaha World Herald, 28 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵¹²Barlow, p. 274.

⁵¹³Copies of Matthews' request and Truman's response are attached as Appendix III.

⁵¹⁴Letter from Secretary Matthews to President Truman, 27 October 1949, p. 2, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

While this scenario could serve to deflect any criticism that the firing was a reprisal for Denfeld's testimony, it does not explain why the President and the leaders of the Defense Department permitted Denfeld to testify. The Congressional hearings were receiving extensive press coverage, and any statement by the CNO was sure to make headlines. If Matthews felt that Denfeld understood "his usefulness as CNO had terminated" there was no reason for him to expect the Admiral's testimony to support the Administration's position. Certainly, when Denfeld did not discuss his statement with Matthews in advance, the Secretary must have suspected that the CNO was going to oppose his position. Although it seems illogical that Denfeld was permitted to testify as a "lame duck," this anomaly was never addressed by the Secretary. The most likely explanation for this inconsistency is that the final firing decision had not yet been made, due either to Matthews' or Truman's desire to see how the hearings played out.

Ignoring this question, the Navy Secretary continued his letter to the President. He explained his rationale for renominating the Admiral for a second term, citing the expected benefit of "continuity" as one of the most significant reasons for his decision. He also described his "harmonious relationship" with the CNO at the time of the renomination, and his belief that they "were in complete agreement on all important questions" affecting the Department.⁵¹⁵ But, after making this recommendation, Matthews soon found that his "expectations would not be realized." Relations between the two men were described as becoming "increasingly difficult." The Secretary then hinted that the Admiral did not have sufficient "loyalty" and "respect for authority" to continue in his present assignment. This situation forced Matthews to conclude that it was "utterly impossible . . . to administer the Department of the Navy in the manner I believe vital to national security." As the clinching argument, the Secretary explained his

⁵¹⁵Ibid.

commitment to "civilian control over the military establishment" and requested the "transfer of Admiral Denfeld to other important duties" for the good of the country.⁵¹⁶ Matthews' letter did not directly accuse the CNO of any mismanagement or direct opposition, it only highlighted an unacceptable situation and proposed his prompt removal.

President Truman's response was direct and concise. He noted that he had "devoted considerable thought" to the Navy's problems "over a long period of time." And concluded that "the action which you recommend meets with my approval." He authorized Matthews to "carry out the transfer which you recommend."⁵¹⁷ Truman's response does not even mention Admiral Denfeld by name or position, seemingly ignoring the man behind the situation. Despite the four pages of correspondence which effected Denfeld's removal, nowhere is the reason for his dismissal clearly stated.

The 4 p.m. presidential news conference of 27 October contained only one agenda item. President Truman announced he had received and approved a request from Secretary Matthews asking that he transfer Admiral Denfeld to other duties.⁵¹⁸ The reason for the transfer was announced as the Admiral's endorsement of the Bogan letter and "other unspecified acts of disloyalty," specifically omitting the Admiral's testimony before the House. One of the first questions asked of Truman was whether or not Admiral Sherman would be Denfeld's replacement. The President declined to answer this query, but later stated that he had not yet decided whom he wanted to appoint. Another reporter asked if Admiral Denfeld had been informed of the President's decision to transfer him. This time, Truman responded, "I suppose so," prompting another correspondent to ask if

⁵¹⁶Ibid., pp. 2 - 3.

⁵¹⁷Letter from President Truman to Secretary Matthews, 27 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁵¹⁸Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1949, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 531 -35 provides a transcript of the entire conference including the letter from Secretary Matthews and Truman's response.

the President himself had told Denfeld. Truman replied that he "had no conversation with anybody but the Secretary of the Navy" on the matter, later clarifying this by noting Johnson had also been present.⁵¹⁹ Despite their careful preparations, this one step had slipped through the cracks of Matthews' and Johnson's plans. Adding to the apparent callousness of the removal was the fact that, until 1949, October 27th had been celebrated as Navy Day. 27 October 1949 was certainly no holiday for the Navy.

Admiral Denfeld was in his Pentagon office when Truman made his announcement. A startled Admiral Price came into Denfeld's office and informed him that his staff had overheard a radio report of the President's announcement removing him as CNO. This unexpected news was quickly confirmed by a yeoman with a news ticker tear sheet.⁵²⁰ Admiral Griffin stated that Denfeld "took it like a man but he was, no question about it, hurt that the President had seen fit to fire him without even calling him and telling him in person."⁵²¹ The CNO had not met with Secretary Matthews since the morning of Tuesday, 25 October and had not been given the courtesy of even a telephone call to prepare him for the President's announcement.⁵²² Rear Admiral Dennison, who considered the CNO an "old and dear friend" asked Truman if it would be acceptable for him, as the President's Aide, to visit Denfeld at his home the night of his removal. Truman had no objection, so Dennison spent the evening with the Denfelds, noting that the Admiral "wasn't resentful. I think he was really relieved because of the intolerable situation he'd been in . . ."⁵²³

⁵¹⁹Ibid.

⁵²⁰Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 14. Admiral Griffin's account of this episode states that Denfeld, Griffin and Admiral Ingersoll (DCNO for Operations and Plans) were in a meeting when Rear Admiral Dennison called to notify the CNO about the announcement. (Griffin interview, p. 191.) I have used Denfeld's scenario, since he should have the most reliable memories of this event.

⁵²¹Griffin interview, p. 191.

⁵²²Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 24 - 28 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁵²³Dennison interview, pp. 141, 201 - 02.

Later, when Secretary Matthews found out that Dennison had visited the fired CNO, he was furious at him for having done so. Dennison reported that Matthews "could hardly speak," but did say, "That's the most disloyal act that I can possibly imagine. Here an officer's been fired and you go up to see him." As soon as Dennison told Matthews that President Truman had given advance approval of this visit, "the Secretary's face fell a mile."⁵²⁴ This incident well illustrates the character and competence of Francis Matthews. He was a brilliant lawyer and administrator, and covered all the contingencies in his decision to replace Admiral Denfeld except the one action of common, human decency that would have been the first concern of any experienced leader.

To ensure its smooth operation, the Navy needed managers to direct its day-to-day activities and administration, and leaders to inspire the institution with vision, commitment and a sense of purpose.⁵²⁵ Matthews was a *manager* of the Navy, not its *leader*. He was not inconsiderate, only inexperienced in leading and motivating people. Denfeld, who had finally assumed a true leadership position following his Congressional testimony, was now able to rally the Navy as a courageous leader wronged by impersonal government bureaucrats.

Matthews called Admiral Denfeld to his office at 10 a.m. on 28 October to discuss his removal from office. This meeting was tense and uncomfortable and lasted for only nineteen minutes.⁵²⁶ Admiral Denfeld later described Secretary Matthews as being "cold" with "no pretense of politeness or remorse."⁵²⁷ The businessman Secretary treated this decision like a corporate transaction, not like the end of a patriotic career. Matthews

⁵²⁴Ibid., p. 202.

⁵²⁵A good, concise differentiation between managers and leaders can be found in Christopher H. Johnson, Captain, USN, (Ret), "Where's the Chief?," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, February 1995, pp. 64 - 66.

⁵²⁶Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 28 October 1949, in the Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁵²⁷Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 14.

recalled that "we had a satisfactory talk, and parted as good mutual friends." He went on to state that "there is nothing personal in what I have done. It is a matter of policy and principle. I have no ill-will toward anyone in the Navy and I am not going to entertain any such thoughts."⁵²⁸ The trouble was that this should have been treated as more of a personal matter. Denfeld felt "particularly bitter" about the manner in which he received word of Matthews' decision.⁵²⁹ This incident only heightened the tensions between Denfeld and Matthews resulting from the CNO's removal.

Matthews stated that he did not inform the CNO of the President's impending announcement because he did not know whether or not the Defense Secretary and the President would approve his request and, if they did not, he did not wish to have already hurt the Admiral's feelings.⁵³⁰ Prematurely informing the CNO of his impending removal also would have damaged Matthews' authority if Johnson or Truman had overruled the Secretary. While it seems highly unlikely that either Johnson or Truman would have rejected the request, especially after having concurred in this decision at their 25 October meeting, the potential cost of informing the CNO that he was to be removed, then having the President keep him on, would have destroyed the Secretary's ability to function in his position.

Historians have consistently objected to Matthews' failure to inform the CNO of Truman's planned statement. Coletta claims that the firing of the Admiral "was made in an utterly gross manner."⁵³¹ Even Jeffrey Barlow describes as "pitiful" Matthews' excuse for

⁵²⁸Omaha World Herald, 29 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵²⁹Letter from Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library, p. 8.

⁵³⁰Barlow, p. 365.

⁵³¹Coletta, Paolo E. The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953, (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), p. 223.

not informing Denfeld of his firing before the President's announcement.⁵³² Nevertheless, when more "considerate actions" were taken in a very similar situation in 1994, the result was even more damaging to the Defense Department. Shortly after taking office, new Navy Secretary Dalton announced that he had recommended the removal of his CNO, Admiral Kelso, for poor leadership during the Tailhook scandal. When the Secretary of Defense rejected Dalton's request, both Kelso's and Dalton's effectiveness had been seriously degraded. The astute lawyer Matthews may have actually considered this possibility and opted to hurt Denfeld rather than risk other embarrassments. But no matter what Matthews' concerns were, he could have clearly communicated the fact that Denfeld's removal was a real possibility. This was not done and the opportunity to forewarn Denfeld was lost. Admiral Denfeld was forced to pay the price for the President's haste to make his announcement and Matthews' and Johnson's failure to act with any sense of common courtesy.

Matthews' letter had not recommended firing the CNO, but instead, transferring him to other important duties. The Navy Secretary saw this as an important distinction and often criticized reporters who described his action as a "firing."⁵³³ A transfer was certainly less susceptible to being seen as a reprisal, and Secretary Matthews still reportedly held the Admiral in great esteem. After meeting with Denfeld on the morning of 28 October, the Secretary announced that he was trying to arrange a new assignment for the CNO "where he could complete his outstanding Navy career with distinction."⁵³⁴ Regardless of the new position, Denfeld would have to accept a cut in pay as well as loss of face, since his position as CNO included a tax-free expense account of four to five

⁵³²Barlow, p. 365.

⁵³³Transcript of Secretary Matthews' appearance on "Meet the Press," 28 January 1950, p. 5, in the Matthews Papers, File "Speeches," Truman Library.

⁵³⁴"Denfeld Offered New Navy Post," Washington Star, 28 October 1949, p. 1.

thousand dollars and handsome living quarters.⁵³⁵ He would also lose his status as the senior officer in the Navy to his relief.

The new position Matthews offered Denfeld turned out to be Admiral Conolly's job in London as Commander in Chief of the Navy's forces in the North Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. Conolly had been in this billet for three years and was due to be transferred. Admiral Denfeld was not sure if he wanted to accept this new position or even to remain in the service because he was eligible to retire at any time. He therefore asked the Secretary to give him sixty days of leave to allow him to think the possibilities over. Matthews agreed and the meeting broke up. Although Matthews insisted he did not "fire" the CNO, this semantics argument was weak. He had removed the Admiral from his current position and was prepared to shift him to one of lower pay, status, and importance. In this writer's view, the Secretary's action clearly meets the criteria to be termed a firing.

The immediate reaction to Denfeld's firing was highly emotional. The Omaha World Herald recorded that "two admirals wept openly when they visited Admiral Denfeld to express sympathies."⁵³⁶ In the afternoon of the 28th, "a demonstrating crowd of 250 Navy enlisted men" packed the CNO's office to offer their condolences. Their spokesman told Denfeld, "Admiral, when you are President we hope you will put the Navy back on its feet."⁵³⁷ On Saturday the 29th, Matthews and Denfeld had been scheduled to attend the Navy - Notre Dame football game in Baltimore. Denfeld appeared and received a "standing ovation from the Midshipmen that lasted fully three minutes." Matthews

⁵³⁵"New Leader Being Sought by Matthews," Omaha World Herald, 29 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵³⁶Omaha World Herald, 28 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵³⁷*Ibid.*, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 546.

canceled his appearance just before kickoff.⁵³⁸ Denfeld was accompanied to the game by Father Maurice Sheehy of Catholic University, well known as a friend of both the CNO and the Navy Secretary.

Sheehy knew all the key players in this incident and had strong ties of personal friendship to Louis Denfeld. His bond to Matthews was also strong, given both men's commitment to the Navy and the Catholic Church. The three had shared dinner as recently as 2 October 1949. Regardless of his feelings of friendship for both men, Sheehy quickly lashed out at Matthews for his action. In a hastily scheduled 27 October news conference, the Catholic leader declared that those responsible for the removal of Admiral Denfeld "have committed a heinous crime against their country and against national security." He went on to term 27 October 1949 "another day of infamy."⁵³⁹ Sheehy sent five telegrams to Matthews between 27 October and 2 November urging him to either reconcile with the CNO or resign. Finally, after receiving no response, he concluded his efforts on 2 November and telegraphed the Secretary, "May God forgive you."⁵⁴⁰

Admiral Denfeld was still serving as CNO during these first few days following Truman's announcement pending the identification of his relief. The Admiral was deeply hurt, but had decided that he had no regrets. He wrote to Captain C. W. Wilkins on 31 October that

you probably know as well as anyone what a terrific time we were having in the JCS. Finally, I just had to make it an issue. Result - I am no longer CNO!

⁵³⁸"Midshipmen Roar Approval of Admiral Denfeld at Game," Washington Star, 30 October 1949, p. 5.

⁵³⁹"Sheehy Flays Ouster of Denfeld, Calls on Matthews to Resign," Washington Star, 28 October 1949, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁰Telegrams from Father Maurice Sheehy to Secretary Matthews, 27, 28, 30 October and 1 and 2 November 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Correspondence - S," Truman Library.

I am very proud of what I did and at least can look myself straight in the eye for the balance of my life.⁵⁴¹

Matthews issued orders to his CNO on 1 November detaching him from his position following the announcement that President Truman had nominated Vice Admiral Forrest Sherman to be the new Chief of Naval Operations. Quite in keeping with recent Defense Department operating procedures, Denfeld first learned of this nomination from his driver who had heard about it on a radio newscast. Denfeld's orders of 1 November directed him upon their receipt to "stand relieved of your duties as Chief of Naval Operations. You will report to the Secretary of the Navy for duty pending further assignment." A more specific set of orders was delivered to him on 3 November, authorizing his requested sixty days of leave to begin on 10 November and directing him to report to the Commandant of the First Naval District in Boston for duty upon the completion of his leave period.⁵⁴² The Secretary attached a personal endorsement to the second set, specifically granting Denfeld the authority "to continue to bear the title and wear the uniform of an Admiral, U. S. Navy."⁵⁴³ This permission was not given lightly. Most senior officers who are relieved for cause are reduced in rank or immediately retired because the number of officers authorized to hold Admiral's rank in the Navy is limited by Congress. Since Denfeld retained his four stars, the Navy was unable to promote another officer. With this small token of appreciation, Louis Denfeld left the Pentagon to ponder his future.

⁵⁴¹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Captain C. W. Wilkins, the Commanding Officer of the U. S. S. Manchester, 31 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - W," Naval Historical Center.

⁵⁴²Military Change of Duty Orders, from Secretary Matthews to Admiral Denfeld, 1 November and 3 November 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁵⁴³Memorandum from Secretary Matthews to Admiral Denfeld, 3 November 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIRING

"I am unimportant, but what happened to me, and the manner of its happening, are of the greatest moment to the nation." (1950 - Admiral Denfeld)⁵⁴⁴

"Admiral Denfeld has been made to walk the plank for having testified before the Armed Services Committee." (28 October 1949 - Congressman Vinson)⁵⁴⁵

The removal of Admiral Denfeld did not end the problems of unification or help the leadership of the Defense Department settle on a effective and affordable national security strategy. The root issues remained. The services still could not agree on the nature of future warfare, and defense budgets continued to be sparse. Denfeld had not been the cause of the Department's difficulties, he had been only one man trying to do the best he could for his service and his country under adverse circumstances. His removal had sent a clear message to all senior officers that to disagree with Secretary Johnson's policies in public was, in effect, a resignation. Congress also reached this conclusion and challenged the policies of the Department as threatening the ability of Congress to properly carry out its constitutional function to raise and organize armies and navies. Although Johnson had ended the "Revolt of the Admirals" with his firing of Louis Denfeld, the dust was far from settled.

Denfeld's removal as Chief of Naval Operations unified the Navy as few other events or individuals could have done. When the crowd of enlisted well-wishers visited the CNO's office on 28 October, Denfeld "faltered with emotion" and told the crowd that this demonstration of support was "the most wonderful thing that has happened to me in all my years in the Navy."⁵⁴⁶ Dynamic leadership for constructive purposes had proven

⁵⁴⁴Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 13.

⁵⁴⁵Press statement by Congressman Carl Vinson, 28 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - V," Naval Historical Center.

⁵⁴⁶"Denfeld Offered New Navy Post," Washington Star, 28 October 1949, p. 1.

successful in unifying the Navy behind the CNO where two years of conciliatory behavior and compromises had failed. The departing CNO's response to his supporters was to urge them to continue the fight to save the Navy and ensure national security. "The Navy is bigger than any individual, bigger than me, bigger than anyone in government, but only as big as all of us together. In order to keep it that way, the thing to do is go back to your jobs and do the best you can."⁵⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Navy spirits sagged. The following "New Prayer for the Navy in 1949 A.D. (After Denfeld)" was circulated in the Navy's offices:

Our Father, who art in Washington
Truman be thy name
Thy Navy's done . . . The Air Force won
On the Atlantic as on the Pacific
Give us this day our appropriations
And forgive us our accusations
As we forgive our accusers
And lead us not into temptation, but
Deliver us from Matthews and Johnson
For thine is the power, O B-36
The Air Force forever and ever,
Airmen.⁵⁴⁸

Although like his service, Louis Denfeld was "considerably crushed" at his removal, according to Hanson W. Baldwin of the New York Times, he "emerged from it more of a hero than he had been as Chief of Naval Operations."⁵⁴⁹ Just as Secretary Sullivan had seen his popularity skyrocket when he resigned in protest over the cancellation of the flush-deck carrier, so Denfeld found he was more recognized and sought after than he had ever been before. Given his political interests and his connections on Capitol Hill, it was inevitable that he would be tempted to try his hand at electoral politics rather than continuing to labor at the beck and call of civilians he was unable to

⁵⁴⁷Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸Anonymous "New Prayer for the Navy in 1949 A.D. (After Denfeld)," in the Denfeld Papers, Box 10, File "Misc. Correspondence, 1948 - 49," Naval Historical Center.

⁵⁴⁹Interview with Hanson W. Baldwin, by John T. Mason, 1975, U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, Transcript, 1978, p. 474, U. S. Naval Academy Library, Special Collections.

effectively oppose. As the Admiral contemplated his future, the battles raged on in Washington.

Secretary Matthews was under considerable pressure, but he was confident that he was in control of the situation. Many members of Congress and the press echoed Father Sheehy's outrage and called for Matthews' resignation. Matthews responded, "I'm confident I'm the boss and when I'm not, the President will have to find a new Secretary I haven't the slightest intention of resigning."⁵⁵⁰ He continued to justify his actions logically and dispassionately: "the prime reason for relieving Admiral Denfeld, in my opinion, is that it was not possible for us to function harmoniously. It is necessary to get a Chief of Naval Operations who believes in unification."⁵⁵¹

He had a valid need for a good relationship with the CNO and certainly had a strong motivation to remove Denfeld. But his comments about unification were mere window dressing. As has been discussed, "unification" meant, and continues to mean, whatever a listener decides he wants it to mean. Denfeld had repeatedly testified that he was in favor of unification, yet Matthews' letter requesting his transfer contained several veiled allegations that his opposition to unification was one of the key causes of his problems with the Secretary.⁵⁵² In fact, both Denfeld and Matthews favored closer cooperation between the services. Only on the means of implementing "unification" did they disagree.

Despite Matthews' bravado and public confidence, the rumors persisted that he was also on the way out. George Dixon of the Omaha World Herald sent in a humorous piece which captured the spirit of the situation:

⁵⁵⁰Omaha World Herald, 31 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews," and transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and Mr. Bradbury, a newspaper reporter, 31 October 1949, in the Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁵⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵⁵²See Appendix III for Matthews' letter.

A Washington news photographer was sent to the Pentagon to get pictures of Admiral Denfeld gloomily packing out. Instead, the photographer ran into the Navy's Secretary, and, misunderstanding his assignment, asked Matthews to pose for some shots unhappily packing his bags after his firing. Matthews complied with the request, probably wondering all the time what the photographer knew that he didn't.⁵⁵³

Matthews tried to ignore the public controversy and concentrate on the selection of Admiral Denfeld's replacement.

Secretary Matthews had always wanted Forrest Sherman to replace Denfeld when the appropriate time came to select a new CNO. Now all the Navy Secretary needed to do was to convince Sherman to take the job, persuade Secretary Johnson and President Truman to make the nomination, and then shepherd it through the angry Senate. In his 28 October meeting with Denfeld, Matthews requested that the CNO order Admiral Sherman back to Washington to meet with the Secretary. Matthews had been unable to transmit this message himself since Sherman was at sea and could not be reached except through Navy communications circuits. It then became obvious to Denfeld that his fears about Sherman's behavior during the hearings had been correct.⁵⁵⁴

The President decided to explore another option for Denfeld's successor. Retired Fleet Admiral Nimitz had probably already received hints from Secretary Matthews about Truman's interest in recalling him to active duty to resume his place as CNO. When Truman called him on Monday, 31 October 1949, Nimitz stated that "only an order from [the President] would bring me to Washington as CNO."⁵⁵⁵ The retired Fleet Admiral had already committed himself to a United Nations' diplomatic mission to Kashmir and felt that he was too old for the Navy job. He recommended either Conolly or Sherman for CNO, preferring Sherman since he was "younger and even less involved in politics."⁵⁵⁶ Although

⁵⁵³George Dixon, "Photographer's Error Starts 'Speculation,'" Omaha World Herald, 5 November 1949, p.3, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵⁵⁴Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 14. The bitter tone of Denfeld's description of Matthews' request shows the resentment felt by Denfeld at having to call in his replacement.

⁵⁵⁵Nimitz's diary entry, quoted in Potter, Nimitz, p. 447.

⁵⁵⁶Ibid.

this effort to return Nimitz to Washington failed, it did provide Matthews with an unexpected supporter in the debates over Denfeld's firing. Nimitz wrote to Father Sheehy that, at their 15 October meeting in New York, Matthews had told him the decision to remove Denfeld had been made following the Bogan incident. This conversation convinced the former-CNO that "I cannot accept the statement that Denfeld was removed by Secretary Matthews as an act of reprisal for the testimony which he gave."⁵⁵⁷

Speculation and recommendations about the new CNO came from all corners during this week. Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois wrote the President on 28 October to inform him "many officers . . . seemed emphatically to prefer Admiral Blandy or Admiral Radford to Admiral Sherman."⁵⁵⁸ Regardless of the Navy's preferences, Sherman was still the media's best bet to replace Denfeld. The Omaha World Herald even mentioned the intriguing combination of Admiral Nimitz returning as CNO with Sherman as his second in command.⁵⁵⁹ Denfeld refused to comment on his preferences for a successor.

Secretary Johnson had no favorite candidate but certainly wanted the new Navy Chief to be someone who would be willing to work within Johnson's system. Many of the potential candidates had disqualified themselves due to their testimony during the Congressional hearings. Blandy's and Conolly's statements had been harsher than Denfeld's, and Radford certainly would be a poor choice to heal the wounds within the Department. Deputy Secretary of Defense Wilfred McNeil stated that Matthews sold Johnson on Sherman as the officer who could bring the Navy into line. McNeil felt that the decision to choose Sherman was Matthews' most consequential act as Secretary of the

⁵⁵⁷Letter from Fleet Admiral Nimitz to Father Sheehy, 13 February 1950, quoted in Barlow, p. 364.

⁵⁵⁸Letter from Governor Adlai Stevenson to President Truman, 28 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1636, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁵⁹"Top Navy Bid Still Uncertain," Omaha World Herald, 1 November 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

Navy.⁵⁶⁰ Matthews was very happy with his new CNO. Admiral Sherman had previously shown a willingness to work with the lawyer from Nebraska. He overcame the initial resistance of many naval officers who saw him an enemy, and quickly demonstrated his proactive leadership style that built on the Navy's strengths and rapidly made improvements in its morale.

Most defense insiders approved of Sherman's selection. Army Lieutenant General Gruenther, the Director of the Joint Staff, wrote General Eisenhower that he was "extremely well pleased" with Admiral Sherman, describing the new CNO as "probably the smartest U. S. planner living today."⁵⁶¹ Newsmen Robert Allen and William Shannon drew a perceptive comparison between the incoming and outgoing CNOs: "'Uncle Louie' Denfeld was affectionately regarded by men who did not respect him as a commander; Sherman is respected by many who will never love him."⁵⁶² One notable dissenting voice in this parade of praise was Hanson W. Baldwin of the New York Times. Maybe because of his friendship with Admiral Denfeld, this correspondent saw another side of Sherman: "he was not as straight-forward as others that I knew. . . . I may be quite unfair to him in saying that he was a manipulator, but he handled power like that."⁵⁶³ President Truman approved Matthews' choice on 2 November. That same day Forrest Sherman was sworn in as Denfeld's replacement for a four-year term.⁵⁶⁴ Senate confirmation would have to wait until January when Congress returned to session.

The public outcry over the removal of Admiral Denfeld was loud and long. President Truman's files contain innumerable letters and telegrams commenting on this

⁵⁶⁰Interview with Wilfred J. McNeil, by Jerry N. Ness, 1972, Washington, D.C., Transcript, pp. 147 - 48, 1979, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁶¹Letter from Lieutenant General Gruenther to General Eisenhower, 12 November 1949, quoted in Rearden, p. 420.

⁵⁶²Robert S. Allen and William V. Shannon, The Truman MERRY-GO-ROUND, (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), p. 484.

⁵⁶³Baldwin interview, pp. 481 - 82.

⁵⁶⁴Letter from Matthews to Truman, 1 November 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1636, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

removal, most of which were strongly opposed to Matthews', Johnson's and the President's actions.⁵⁶⁵ Included in this massive outpouring were messages from Senators and Congressmen demanding to know what the Chief Executive intended to do to ensure the freedom of military officers to speak their mind in testimony before Congress without fear of reprisals. Many messages compared Admiral Denfeld to Army Air Corps General Billy Mitchell as men who sacrificed their careers for what they believed were the defense needs of the Nation. Others charged that Johnson was establishing a "communist-type" dictatorship in the Defense Department.⁵⁶⁶

Congressman Vinson captured the feelings of many Americans when he issued the following statement in response to the announcement of Denfeld's transfer:

Admiral Denfeld has been made to walk the plank for having testified before the Armed Services Committee that the Navy is not being consulted as to its functions, that the Navy's roles and missions are being altered, that the Naval Air Arm is being forced into a state of weakness, and that the Navy is not accepted in full partnership in the National Defense structure. For having warned Congress and the country that such a state of affairs in his opinion exists in the Navy, he has been relieved of his high office. The security of the Nation demands that responsible military men at all times be free to give to the Congress and the country the true state of affairs as they see it in the Armed Services even though their views run counter to those of the civilian heads, and in consequence of their having done so, there should be no reprisals. . . . The Congress and the Committee cannot sit quietly by and permit reprisals against witnesses who have testified before them.⁵⁶⁷

Although Matthews was certainly persuaded that his removal of Denfeld had improved his control over the Navy, the consequent public outcry forced the Secretary to devote much of the next three months to defending his action.

Other members of Congress, dispersed across the country, also reacted passionately to the firing of Admiral Denfeld, but in an uncoordinated manner. Some joint

⁵⁶⁵Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁶⁶Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷"Statement to the Press by the Honorable Carl Vinson," 28 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - V," Naval Historical Center.

statements were issued, but as Truman and Johnson had expected, their delay in removing the Admiral until after Congress recessed certainly hindered the Legislative Branch's ability to respond. Leslie Arends (R - Ill.) appears to have been the first Representative to react to the firing. He heard about it before the President's news conference and immediately cabled Vinson to recommend an immediate recall of the House Armed Services Committee to address "this insult to Congress." He feared that "a campaign of terror" was being initiated in the Pentagon and wanted to exert Congressional pressure to protect the witnesses.⁵⁶⁸

Senator Robert C. Hendrickson of New Jersey telegrammed the President on 28 October to characterize Denfeld's removal as "shocking" and "reminiscent of purges in Russia and Nazi Germany."⁵⁶⁹ Congressman George Bates, a Republican from Massachusetts, sent an angry telegram to Secretary Johnson on the evening of Denfeld's removal:

I consider [the] Denfeld removal distinct violation your pledge of no reprisals. Such action would have very serious repercussions in both Congressional and Naval circles at time we are trying to find solution of very complex problem. Acting as conciliator you can make great contribution to these ends.⁵⁷⁰

Johnson chose to send an explanation of his actions to Congressman Bates in response to this telegram, and to release both pieces of correspondence to the press to head off any other criticism. Quoting from his letter to the Service Secretaries on 24 October, the Secretary of Defense explained to Congressman Bates that a lack of "necessary qualifications" and not offensive testimony had caused Denfeld's removal.

⁵⁶⁸"Adm. Denfeld Loses Post in Service Row," Army and Navy Journal, 29 October 1949, p. 236.

⁵⁶⁹Telegram from Senator Robert C. Hendrickson to President Truman, 28 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁷⁰Telegram from Representative George Bates to Secretary Johnson, 27 October 1949, in Louis A. Johnson, Statements and Speeches of Louis A. Johnson, Secretary of Defense March 29, 1949 - September 12, 1950, Vol. II, p. 515, unpublished mimeograph, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historian, Washington.

Four members of the House Armed Services Committee; Sasser (D-Md.), Hebert (D-La.), Arends (R-Ill.), and Cole (R-N.Y.), issued a sharp statement on the firing on 29 October. Their blast charged that Johnson's justification for firing Denfeld due to his "lack of qualifications" took the "prize for outright quackery and injustice." Furthermore, they asserted that any suggestion "that his removal is not a reprisal would be laughable were the situation not so tragic. . . . Evasive and misleading excuses and specious arguments do not cover up this reprisal."⁵⁷¹ Committee Chairman Vinson issued a sharp condemnation of the firing, but decided not to act on the matter until January when tempers would have cooled. Although this decision effectively sealed Admiral Denfeld's fate, Vinson probably made a choice that well served the national defense.⁵⁷² Any hasty actions could have inflamed the conflict and made its settlement more difficult.

Congressman W. Sterling Cole sought information from senior Navy and Marine Corps officers to support his view that the firing would effectively "gag" widespread military dissent. He sent telegrams to all flag and general officers of the naval services: "In strict confidence, please advise if you are in accord with views expressed by Admiral Denfeld before Armed Services Committee."⁵⁷³ Matthews got wind of this survey and authorized his senior officers to reply, provided they sent him a copy of their response. Even with this monitoring, 55% of the 308 officers who received Cole's telegram responded to it. 16% of those who responded stated they could not answer the question due to Navy regulations. Of the rest, 82% supported Denfeld and the remainder gave non-committal replies.⁵⁷⁴ When Congress returned to Washington in January 1950,

⁵⁷¹Statement of the four Representatives, quoted in "Johnson, Matthews 'Not Just,'" Omaha World Herald, 1 November 1949, and "House Committee Members Angered at Denfeld Relief," Army and Navy Journal, 5 November 1949, p. 250.

⁵⁷²Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 547. Congressman Vinson's statement was quoted in the previous section of this paper.

⁵⁷³Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴Ibid., and Paolo E. Coletta, "The Defense Unification Battle, 1947 - 50: The Navy," Prologue, Spring 1975, p. 15.

Admiral Denfeld's removal, and the larger issue of protecting witnesses from reprisals, would receive great attention.

The reaction of senior naval officers to the removal of the CNO was understandably bitter. Vice Admiral Felix Stump, the Commander of the Atlantic Fleet's Air Forces, wrote to Admiral Denfeld on 31 October to praise his testimony as "courageous" and predicted that Denfeld would "go down in history as one who stood courageously for what was right."⁵⁷⁵ On 4 November, retired Admiral Standley sent Congressman Vinson a letter characterizing Matthews' action as a "crucifixion" of Admiral Denfeld.⁵⁷⁶ Admiral Radford considered the firing to be "punitive and cynical."⁵⁷⁷ Denfeld's patron, retired Fleet Admiral Leahy, wrote sadly to one of his Naval Academy classmates that "Denfeld is the only one who put up a rational defense for the Navy and he is now being removed. . . . He will be replaced by a stooge. Things like that did not happen in our day."⁵⁷⁸ Despite these sentiments, there was no cohesiveness to the opposition to the Secretary's action, and most of the "revolting admirals" muttered in the background without taking any effective action. When reporters asked Vice Admiral Bogan to comment on Denfeld's removal, he offered no opinion, stating only, "I learn quickly."⁵⁷⁹

Of course, the Navy's foremost publicist, Rear Admiral Gallery, continued his unofficial campaign to raise public awareness of the Navy's predicament. His January 1950 Collier's article, "If This Be Treason - " attacked the firing and its implications. He described the issue of permitting military officers freedom of expression before Congress

⁵⁷⁵Letter from Vice Admiral Felix Stump to Admiral Denfeld, 31 October 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - S," Naval Historical Center.

⁵⁷⁶Letter from Admiral W. H. Standley to Representative Vinson, 4 November 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - S," Naval Historical Center.

⁵⁷⁷Jurika, p. 217.

⁵⁷⁸Letter from retired Fleet Admiral Leahy to Joe Powell, quoted in Henry H. Adams, Witness to Power: The Life of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute Press, 1985), p. 339.

⁵⁷⁹"Denfeld Offered New Navy Post," Washington Star, 28 October 1949, p. 1.

as a matter "bigger . . . than the B-36 or even the fate of the Navy." Gallery saw Denfeld's removal as a reprisal which would effectively gag all officers' future testimony. He went on to charge that "while we are pouring billions into Europe to stop the Communist advance abroad, we have seen fit to adopt their thought-control tactics in the United States." Gallery characterized Johnson's claims that the firing was not a reprisal as "pettifoggery."⁵⁸⁰ He helped raise public awareness of the Navy's understanding of national defense and anger at Denfeld's removal, but could not change the fact that Admiral Denfeld was no longer CNO.

The public was very interested in the struggle between the armed services and responded vigorously to the firing of the CNO. The President's and Navy Secretary's files in the Truman Library contain thousands of letters and telegrams commenting on the decision. By a ratio of about 50 to 1, they objected to Admiral Denfeld's removal.⁵⁸¹ Winona Mensch of Williamsport, Pennsylvania asserted that the "timing of the dismissal seems to have been cunningly planned - on what we all honor as Navy Day and at a time when Congress was not in session."⁵⁸² Los Angeles' Katherine Calvin cabled that the "firing is [a] deliberate crucifixion of [a] patriotic honest man."⁵⁸³ Harry Burkett of Johnstown, Pennsylvania wrote Truman that "I never expected you to pull such a rotten, low down trick as to fire Admiral Denfeld for speaking his mind in defense of his Navy."⁵⁸⁴ And Ruth Begley of Honolulu chided the President, for having sacked "a man just because he doesn't agree with you. That's not the American way to do things, that's

⁵⁸⁰Daniel V. Gallery, Rear Admiral USN, "If This Be Treason - ," *Collier's*, 21 January 1950, p. 14 - 16.

⁵⁸¹Truman Papers, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," and Matthews Papers, Box 27, File "Denfeld Correspondence," Truman Library.

⁵⁸²Letter from Winona Mensch to President Truman, 30 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁸³Telegram from Katherine Calvin to President Truman, 28 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁸⁴Letter from Harry Burkett to President Truman, 28 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

Russia's way of doing things."⁵⁸⁵ The majority of the letters were not from Denfeld's friends or acquaintances but from average Americans who were more concerned about protecting democratic, representative Government than about the fate of the Navy.

A typical submission in support of Secretary Matthews' action shows the opposite focus. "Your displacing of Admiral Denfeld is applauded. Not only have his recent utterances shown him to be in the wrong place, but his strangely sleepy, slouching appearance long have marked him as not up to the high position of Chief of Naval Operations."⁵⁸⁶ In this case, the letter's author, Walter Strong, reacted to the details of the situation rather than its broader implications and precedent.

Another peculiar undercurrent of opinion in the debate on the firing of the CNO involved religious rather than constitutional issues. Matthews' public image as a prominent Catholic caused Christian Century magazine to charge that he was "turning the U. S. Navy over to the Pope as a Catholic convert."⁵⁸⁷ Mrs. Paul Regalia of San Francisco echoed this fear in her 28 October letter to the President, "I implore you, for the good of the country, do not replace Admiral Denfeld with a Catholic. One Catholic is Enough!"⁵⁸⁸ The Secretary was a devout Roman Catholic, but there is no evidence that his religious beliefs in any way influenced any of his decisions or his overall performance as a member of Truman's cabinet.

The press was much more evenly divided on the firing of Admiral Denfeld than either the public or Congress. David Lawrence, a consistent Navy supporter, wrote that Admiral Denfeld might become a "martyr to the cause of free government," and that "a good case for impeachment" of Matthews and Johnson could be made. He contended that

⁵⁸⁵Letter from Ruth Begley to President Truman, 27 December 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁸⁶Letter from Walter W. Strong to President Truman, 29 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

⁵⁸⁷H. W. Becker, "St. Pat Was His Patron Saint," Dundee (Omaha, Nebraska) Sun, 11 March 1976, p. 15-A, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁵⁸⁸Letter from Mrs. Paul Regalia to President Truman, 28 October 1949, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1637, File "Naval Operations," Truman Library.

civilian control was not at issue but only the ability of military officers to express their views freely to Congress.⁵⁸⁹ The San Francisco Chronicle added that "the public has more reason to be impressed with Admiral Denfeld's judgment than with that of Matthews."⁵⁹⁰ The editors of the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Honolulu Advertiser also opposed the firing of the Admiral. The former stated that "there is nothing that can excuse the ruthless manner in which President Truman 'fired' Admiral Denfeld," and that "laying a whip over the shoulders of able officers and gagging them into terrorized silence" is no way to achieve true unification.⁵⁹¹ The Hawaiian daily concluded that "for expressing his honest opinion, born of experience and a sense of duty to his service and his nation, Admiral Denfeld has been publicly fired."⁵⁹²

Attempts to maintain journalistic objectivity were few. The Army and Navy Journal, whose readership was obviously divided over this issue, reported that Secretary Matthews had not mentioned Denfeld's testimony in his letter to the President. But it went on to assert that "it was obvious" Denfeld's statements before the Armed Services Committee "relative to the administration of the Unification Act were those to which the Secretary took such vigorous exception."⁵⁹³ The Naval Academy's alumni magazine, Shipmate, observed that "the management of the military establishment is entirely political," and excused some of the confusion within the Navy and the inter-service misunderstanding by stating that the uniformed leaders' "lips have been sealed by orders . . . or by the need to protect naval secrets."⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the article advocated a more vocal Navy campaign to get the sea services' message across.

⁵⁸⁹David Lawrence, "Contempt of Congress," U. S. News and World Report, 4 November 1949, p. 34.

⁵⁹⁰"Denfeld Ouster Outrageous," San Francisco Chronicle, 29 October 1949, p. 10.

⁵⁹¹Philadelphia Inquirer, quoted in "House Committee Members Angered at Denfeld Relief," Army and Navy Journal, 5 November 1949, p. 250.

⁵⁹²"The Ouster of Admiral Denfeld," Honolulu Advertiser, 29 October 1949, p. 6.

⁵⁹³"Adm. Denfeld Loses Post in Service Row," Army and Navy Journal, 29 October 1949, p. 236.

⁵⁹⁴"The Navy on Capitol Hill," Shipmate, November 1949, p. 2.

The Alsop brothers and Drew Pearson of the Washington Post came out strongly in favor of Secretary Matthews' stand against the rebellious admirals. Pearson compared him to Woodrow Wilson's Navy Secretary, Josephus Daniels, who banned alcohol from all naval vessels, as a civilian leader who could stand up to the Navy's "brass."⁵⁹⁵ The Alsop brothers, while recognizing Denfeld's dilemma of trying to please both his aviators and the Secretary, praised Matthews for his "courage and conviction" in taking an action both logical and essential to continued civilian control of the Armed Forces.⁵⁹⁶ From Britain, the London Economist asked: "What faith can the United States have in Chiefs of Staff who behave like children? What faith can the powers who signed the North Atlantic Treaty have when their strongest partner shows much internal weakness?"⁵⁹⁷

Probably the most perspicacious comment on the affair came in Cedric Worth's Mutual Radio broadcast of 28 October 1949. Worth was a friend of Secretary Matthews and had spoken with the Navy Secretary several times during the day following the President's announcement. According to a transcript of a 28 October conversation between Matthews and Worth, the Secretary informed the broadcaster that there were some sensitive matters relative to Denfeld's removal which he could not discuss. Matthews asserted that his decision to transfer the CNO had been made on 4 October, but told Worth that "I can't tell you why that is because I won't talk about that even on the phone."⁵⁹⁸ Based on the Secretary's later statements, the unspoken reasons centered around Denfeld's signing of the blank endorsement to Admiral Bogan's letter. Worth understood the Secretary's reasoning if not the specifics, and stated that "there is a great

⁵⁹⁵Drew Pearson, "Civilian Control Essential," Washington Post, 31 October 1949. Matthews liked this comparison, later borrowing it for use in a 7 November interview with the Washington Star. (Martin S. Hayden, "Revolt' is Over, Matthews Says in Revealing Role in Navy Fight," Washington Star, 8 November 1949, p. 1.)

⁵⁹⁶Joseph Alsop and Stewart Alsop, "The Denfeld Story," Washington Post, 31 October 1949.

⁵⁹⁷"State of the Unification," London Economist, 22 October 1949, quoted in Phillip S. Meilinger, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, "The Admirals' Revolt of 1949: Lessons for Today," Parameters, September 1989, p. 94.

⁵⁹⁸Transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and Cedric Worth, 28 October 1949, in the Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

deal more to the controversy in Washington than has been revealed on the air or in the press, and there is a great deal which will never be revealed because it is locked in the hearts of men."⁵⁹⁹

Admiral Denfeld's opinion of his removal was one aspect of the controversy which was unclear at this juncture. He avoided making any statements and only expressed his feelings privately to friends. He planned to maintain a low profile during his sixty days of leave by making some repairs to his home in Massachusetts and possibly spending some time at Miami Beach.⁶⁰⁰ Captain Karig, his public relations officer, told the media on 29 October that he thought Admiral Denfeld would probably retire rather than accept a "lesser post," but this was by no means a foregone conclusion.⁶⁰¹ Denfeld wrote to retired Admiral Stark that "my conscience is clear and each morning I can look myself in the face while I shave, which I am quite sure many others we know cannot do."⁶⁰² He later told Admiral Staton that "it is my fervent hope that the issue will be kept alive until the reconvening of Congress and at least clarified to such an extent that other members of the Armed Forces will feel free to appear before the elected representatives of the people without fear of reprisal."⁶⁰³ The Admiral understood that he was not in a position to demand an inquiry and did not want to follow Captain Crommelin's example. He planned to wait for public opinion and Congressional discontent to provide him with an opportunity to challenge his removal.

⁵⁹⁹Transcript of Cedric Foster's 28 October 1949 radio broadcast in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶⁰⁰Letters from Admiral Denfeld to Captain P. D. Stroop, 22 November 1949 and W. L. Tabb, Jr., 21 November 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, Files "Correspondence - S," and "Correspondence - T," Naval Historical Center.

⁶⁰¹"Storm Bursts Over Firing for Denfeld," Omaha World Herald, 29 October 1949, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁶⁰²Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Admiral Harold Stark, 17 November 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - S," Naval Historical Center.

⁶⁰³Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Admiral Adolphus Staton, 28 November 1949, in the Denfeld Papers, Box 9, File "Correspondence - S," Naval Historical Center.

Admiral Denfeld was not the only participant in the "revolt" to suffer the wrath of the Navy Department. In November Captain Burke's OP-23 office was closed down by the Navy's Inspector General for two days at Secretary Matthews' direction. This allowed the Department to search the organization's files for any evidence tying OP-23 to Captain Crommelin's disclosures or other breeches of security. Burke himself narrowly escaped Matthews' anger to continue his career to an eventual term as CNO.⁶⁰⁴ The investigation of OP-23 found no incriminating evidence, and both Matthews and Burke downplayed its significance. Nevertheless, one of Admiral Sherman's first acts as CNO was to disband this organization, stating that "its functions had been completed."⁶⁰⁵

Vice Admiral Bogan had also clearly lost Secretary Matthews' support. In 1949, Bogan's memorandum had precipitated the split between the Secretary and the CNO and had irretrievably connected his name with the Navy "rebellion." Shortly after Denfeld's removal, Bogan heard through the press that he was going to be issued orders to report as Commanding Officer of the Atlantic Fleet Air Command in Pensacola. This two-star billet was significantly junior to his current three-star fleet command. Bogan asked to retire rather than accept this demotion. Under normal circumstances, his retirement would have been accompanied by a ceremonial promotion to four-star Admiral, but Secretary Matthews is reputed to have personally canceled this promotion.⁶⁰⁶ Denfeld later wrote that "I never let such a thing occur when I was Chief of Naval Personnel."⁶⁰⁷

Admiral Blandy, passed over twice for CNO, had also had enough, and elected to retire effective 1 February 1950. Denfeld, although never especially close to Blandy, felt

⁶⁰⁴The details of this attempt are outside the scope of this study, but can be found in Potter, Burke, pp. 326 - 28, and Hammond, "Super Carriers and B-36 Bombers," p. 548.

⁶⁰⁵"OP-23 Disbanded," Army and Navy Journal, 5 November 1949, p. 251, and Harold B. Hinton, "Sherman Puts End to 'Operation 23'," New York Times, 4 November 1949, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁶Edward P. Stafford, Commander USN (Ret.), "Saving Carrier Aviation - 1949 Style," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1990, p. 50.

⁶⁰⁷Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 15.

that the callous firing of the CNO influenced Blandy's decision to end his naval career.⁶⁰⁸ Vice Admiral Price, Denfeld's Vice Chief of Naval Operations, was transferred to another lower-ranking position shortly after Admiral Sherman's arrival, but this was not unusual. Typically an aviator was chosen as VCNO when a non-aviator was CNO. Now that the airman Sherman held the Navy's top spot, Price needed to be moved to retain this balance. Nevertheless, some saw Price's transfer as another reprisal against the officers who had led the Navy's "revolt."

On several occasions during November, Denfeld discussed his own proposed transfer to Conolly's European position with Secretary Matthews, but did not decide whether or not to accept it until 10 December.⁶⁰⁹ On that date, he informed the Secretary that he intended to decline the European post because he felt he would be unable to obtain "the necessary respect and confidence" from allied governments. Denfeld based his concern on the Secretary's veiled allegations in his letter to the President that Denfeld lacked "loyalty and respect for authority." He also feared that his opinions on allied planning would either be discounted or would "reopen the recent controversy to the embarrassment of my colleagues, my superiors and our government."⁶¹⁰ Denfeld had been the champion of a conventional response to a Soviet attack on Western Europe. Since the proponents of the "atomic blitz" had seemingly prevailed in the recent hearings, placing Denfeld in another position where he would be forced to either repudiate his convictions or openly oppose his civilian superiors did not seem to be in the Nation's best interests.

Matthews believed that Denfeld had made a bad decision, but accepted it and let the Admiral return to Massachusetts to complete his leave.⁶¹¹ The press agreed with the

⁶⁰⁸Ibid. The correspondence relative to Admiral Blandy's retirement can be found in the Truman Papers, Official Files, Box 1285c, File "Department of the Navy - 1950," Truman Library.

⁶⁰⁹Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, 28 October - 10 December 1949, Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

⁶¹⁰Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Secretary Matthews, 14 December 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶¹¹Transcript of Secretary Matthews' interview on "Meet the Press," 28 January 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Speeches," Truman Library.

Secretary. The Washington Post's 21 December editorial described Denfeld's action as one of "picayunishness," based on "pouting."⁶¹² The Milwaukee Journal similarly asserted that Denfeld's "bitterness" determined his decision and that his conduct was characterized by a "pettiness and peevishness that is beneath him."⁶¹³ Now that the initial shock of Denfeld's firing had worn off and the Admiral seemed to be placing personal concerns over national interests, popular support for his position seemed to diminish.

His refusal to take Conolly's position did not force Denfeld into retirement. Previously, the Secretary had offered to consider the ex-CNO "for any other four-star job in the Navy."⁶¹⁴ Denfeld wrote to Matthews that he would "be glad, of course, to serve in any assignment that you may choose in which the handicaps imposed by recent events will not be present."⁶¹⁵ But at the time, the Secretary had nothing else to offer Denfeld. Matthews later stated that upon adjournment of the 10 December meeting, Denfeld had told the Secretary that if he had been in Matthews' place, he would have done the same thing (removed the CNO). This amiable parting was consistent with Matthews' other statements that the two Navy leaders retained a cordial relationship even after Denfeld's transfer. But Denfeld objected to this account, informing Senator Knowland that "I don't recall ever having said that I was not in a mood that would have given rise to such a statement."⁶¹⁶ The differences between Matthews' and Denfeld's views on this situation were hardening, just in time for Congress to return from its recess and begin to look into the matter.

Secretary Johnson certainly believed himself to be totally in control of the Department following his triumph in the Congressional hearings. Although he knew that

⁶¹²"Denfeld's Refusal," Washington Post, 21 December 1949.

⁶¹³J. D. Ferguson, "Admiral Denfeld Hurts Himself," Milwaukee Journal, 21 December 1949.

⁶¹⁴Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 14.

⁶¹⁵Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Secretary Matthews, 14 December 1949, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶¹⁶Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, p. 8, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

members of Congress would demand an investigation of the removal of the CNO, he believed that he could defend his decisions and had the President's support. In December 1949 he visited Admiral Conolly's headquarters in London and, according to the Admiral, was very contemptuous of Conolly and his service. Johnson was reported to have told a crowd of British and American naval officers, "we're going ahead and we're going to build up the Air Force I'm a great friend of the Air Force." Later in the visit Johnson privately told Conolly, "Well Admiral, all I want to tell you is, you'd better keep your nose clean."⁶¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, Admiral Conolly was transferred to a "twilight tour" as President of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Secretary Johnson seemed fully to have consolidated his authority over the Department.

⁶¹⁷Conolly interview, pp. 402 - 04.

CONGRESS EXAMINES THE REMOVAL OF THE CNO

"The removal of Admiral Denfeld was a reprisal against him for giving testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. This act is a blow against effective representative government . . . " (1950 - House Armed Services Committee Report on the Hearings on Unification and Strategy)⁶¹⁸

"I have waited in the hope that some Committee of Congress would ask me. I have been willing at all times to testify and have never had the slightest objection to anything in connection with the whole matter being made public." (1950 - Admiral Denfeld)⁶¹⁹

Congress returned to Washington in early January 1950 to many unanswered questions regarding the Navy's future and the firing of the CNO. Congressman Vinson's Committee was preparing its formal report on the unification and strategy hearings and intended therein to address the Denfeld firing. While this report was being compiled, the Senate's Armed Services Committee quickly took up Admiral Sherman's confirmation and the accompanying investigation into the removal of his predecessor.

Secretary Matthews and Admiral Sherman answered questions before Senator Tydings' Committee on 12 January 1950. Their questions concentrated on Matthews' and Sherman's views on the freedom of naval officers to testify before Congress. Both Matthews and Sherman stated that witnesses were always able to give their personal views to Congress without fear of punishment, yet "punishment" did not include transfers within the service. They asserted that the Navy depended on loyalty and a unified chain of command. If an officer did not agree with his superior on an important principle, he should be moved to another position.⁶²⁰ When Secretary Matthews was asked his opinion of Rear Admiral Gallery's recent accusations in Collier's about reprisals, the Secretary

⁶¹⁸House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 56.

⁶¹⁹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, p. 10, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶²⁰John G. Norris, "Senate Unit Indorses Sherman: Denfeld Ouster Probe Dropped," Washington Post, 13 January 1950, p. 1.

restated his belief that moving an officer out of the chain of command did not "constitute a 'reprisal' or 'punishment.'"⁶²¹ He also claimed that he "could not have administered the Navy with Admiral Denfeld as Chief of Naval Operations."⁶²²

The new Navy team was convincing. Admiral Sherman impressed the Senators, and Matthews' explanation of his views about Congressional testimony seemed to quiet some of his critics. John Norris' 13 January 1950 article in the Washington Post stated that, following the Secretary's presentation, both Tydings and Vinson had decided that no formal investigation into the Denfeld ouster would be necessary.⁶²³ Admiral Denfeld recognized that the Congressional "day in court" he had hoped for was slipping away. He wrote to his friend Davis Merwyn,

He [Matthews] is cleverly trying to lay stress on the Crommelin matter and the Bogan letter to put up a smoke screen so that it will look as though he fired me for those two incidents, before my testimony before the Committee, but you and I know that our relations were most cordial up to the time I made my statement and that is the reason I was replaced.⁶²⁴

Republican members of the Senate Armed Services Committee continued to call for an official investigation of the firing, but Senator Tydings was able to override their objections and get Sherman's confirmation to the Senate floor by 13 January.

It is often said that among the best ways to judge a man is to identify his enemies. Under that criteria, Secretary Matthews received a fine compliment when the then-obscure Senator Joseph McCarthy rose on the Senate floor to challenge the Navy Secretary's actions. The Senator from Wisconsin did not object to Admiral Sherman, but desired to

⁶²¹Ibid., p. 12.

⁶²²Omaha World Herald, 13 January 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews." Another good account of this hearing can be found in "Sherman Wins," New York Herald Tribune, 13 January 1950, pp. 1ff.

⁶²³John G. Norris, "Senate Unit Indorses Sherman: Denfeld Ouster Probe Dropped," Washington Post, 13 January 1950, p. 1.

⁶²⁴Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Davis Merwyn, 13 February 1950, in the Radford Papers, Naval Historical Center, quoted in Barlow, p. 365.

discuss the "'viciously dangerous' situation of lowering an 'iron curtain' between Congress and the Armed Services."⁶²⁵ Using tactics which he would later make infamous, the Senator dramatically questioned the integrity of Secretary Matthews rather than dealing with the pertinent facts of the case.

Matthews testified before the Armed Services Committee on 12 January that Admiral Denfeld had not been given his commission for his second term even though the Senate had confirmed his nomination. Since his commission had not been delivered, a vacancy in the CNO position had existed since 15 December. Because Denfeld had vacated the office, Sherman had a clear title and could be confirmed using standard procedures.⁶²⁶ Both Matthews and the Committee saw this issue as a mere technicality and moved on to other matters. But Senator McCarthy latched onto this point like a bulldog.

Somehow the Wisconsin Senator had obtained a photostatic copy of Denfeld's signed commission for a second term, and he waved it like a flag while he charged the Navy's Secretary with providing incorrect testimony to the Senate. McCarthy asserted that the commission raised the question of whether a vacancy did exist in the CNO's office, and "whether the Secretary of the Navy is a man who is incompetent or just plain untruthful."⁶²⁷ Addressing the vacancy issue, the Senator pointed to a 1935 Supreme Court decision where the Court ruled the President did not have the authority to fire a public official merely because his views differed from those of his superiors.⁶²⁸ McCarthy had done his homework so well that Senator Tydings was unable to respond to this charge without additional study.

⁶²⁵John G. Norris, "Senate Unit Indorses Sherman: Denfeld Ouster Probe Dropped," Washington Post, 13 January 1950, p. 12.

⁶²⁶Memorandum from Secretary Matthews to Senator Tydings, 23 January 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶²⁷Senator McCarthy's statement is reprinted in "Denfeld Commission for 2d Tour Revealed," Army and Navy Journal, 21 January 1950, p. 554.

⁶²⁸This decision is "Humphrey's Executor v. U. S.," 27 May 1935.

Senator McCarthy's tactics disturbed Denfeld, who had no intent to ruin Matthews or to get his position back. After the events of the last several months, he recognized that he would be unable to effectively run the Navy as CNO. To guide the Senate's attention back to the issue of free testimony, Louis Denfeld announced that he was requesting retirement effective 1 March 1950 "in order to remove any legal technicalities."⁶²⁹ He announced that "it has never occurred to me to question the President's authority to remove me, or to claim that I was still CNO." The Admiral also realized that retirement would allow him to freely express his concerns about national security and, in his view, enable him to better serve the Navy and the Nation.⁶³⁰

Secretary Matthews had the Navy's Legal Counsel prepare a position paper on the legal precedents and attached this to his own 8-page explanation of how Denfeld's commission was delivered.⁶³¹ This package helped convince the Committee that a vacancy did exist. The Omaha World Herald wrote that "Senator Tydings called the whole issue a 'sham battle' and added: 'The President could have removed Admiral Denfeld if he had taken 10 oaths, signed 75 commissions, affixed 415 seals to it, and served in the office for 15 years 6 months.'"⁶³² This debate was easily settled in Matthews' favor, but McCarthy's other points were more difficult to refute.

McCarthy had pointed out Matthews' unfamiliarity with the Navy and questioned how he was able to require that any officer "disloyal to his concept of naval strategy," or "who disagreed with him on how to run the Navy will be transferred to the Siberia of an inferior post." The Senator went on to ridicule Matthews' position, observing that he had "no background which could even remotely entitle him to this claim of being a great naval

⁶²⁹Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Secretary Matthews, 24 January 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶³⁰Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," pp. 15 and 63.

⁶³¹Memorandum from Secretary Matthews to Senator Tydings, 23 January 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶³²Omaha World Herald, 24 January 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

strategist." McCarthy had served with the Marines in the Pacific during World War II and had high praise for "outstanding naval officers" such as Captain Crommelin and Vice Admiral Bogan who placed the good of the country above their own careers. He recommended strengthening the current laws on reprisals to prevent any recurrence of the Denfeld removal.⁶³³

Senator McCarthy had conducted some research to support his contention that officers saw Admiral Denfeld's removal as a signal to conform or be quiet.

I have talked with many of the officers in the Pentagon during the past few weeks. . . . I asked them if they would be willing to testify if the unification hearings were reopened. The strange thing to me was the unanimity of their replies. You could sum them up as, "I would be willing to testify today only if I was prepared to resign tomorrow." Isn't that a strange situation? Isn't it an unhealthy one?⁶³⁴

McCarthy had raised enough questions concerning the entire episode that Admiral Sherman's confirmation and the Denfeld firing were referred back to Tydings's Committee for further study.

The Republican members of the Senate Armed Services Committee clamored for Matthews to be subpoenaed to answer McCarthy's charges, but Tydings and his allies defeated their proposal. Rather than demand the Secretary's views, Tydings asked Matthews to appear to try and "clear up the Denfeld thing." Apparently, Matthews had previously told the Senator of the blank Bogan endorsement issue, and Tydings felt that this "story . . . might put a different light on it, and it might end the whole thing."⁶³⁵ On 30 January 1950, the Secretary testified in closed session for over 5 hours and answered extensive and difficult questions from all sides. The transcript of this discussion is not

⁶³³Senator McCarthy's statement is reprinted in "Denfeld Commission for 2d Tour Revealed," Army and Navy Journal, 21 January 1950, p. 554.

⁶³⁴Ibid.

⁶³⁵Transcript of telephone conversation between Secretary Matthews and Senator Tydings, 10 January 1950, in the Secretary of the Navy's appointment calendar, Matthews Papers, Truman Library.

available, but excerpts are included in a 10-page rebuttal Admiral Denfeld submitted to the Committee and which is included in the Matthews Papers.⁶³⁶ News reports stated that Matthews "did a good job" and "satisfied" the Committee.⁶³⁷ Senator Tydings' statement concluded that Denfeld's removal resulted from an "honest difference of opinion upon Navy Department policy," and that there was no existing condition which would preclude naval officers from presenting honest testimony to Congress. Although the Committee took no formal vote, there was "no dissent," and Sherman's nomination went back to the Senate floor where it was quickly confirmed.⁶³⁸

The fragments of Matthews' testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee included in Admiral Denfeld's letter to Senator Knowland give the best indication of the Secretary's true rationale for firing the CNO. Admiral Denfeld was never asked to provide his side of the story, even though he made it clear that he was ready to testify if asked. Senator Knowland recommended that the Committee provide Denfeld a copy of Matthews' testimony and give him an opportunity to respond.⁶³⁹ This option was approved, yet Senator Tydings announced his assessment of the CNO's removal before Denfeld's comments were even requested. Although Denfeld's extensive response seems to have had no influence on the Congressional debate, it can help researchers understand the circumstances of Denfeld's removal.

The most precise statement of Matthews' actual thought process in firing the CNO can be found in an exchange with Senator Cain during the 30 January session:

⁶³⁶The transcript of this session was at least 259 pages long, but is not available to the public. Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, 9 February 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶³⁷"Boss of the Navy Now in Solid," Omaha World Herald, 12 February 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁶³⁸"Denfeld Firing Probe Closes," Omaha World Herald, 31 January 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁶³⁹Letter from Senator Knowland to Admiral Denfeld, 2 February 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

Senator Cain: It seems clear to me that Admiral Denfeld's usefulness to you was not terminated because of the Bogan letter and the two endorsements, but it was terminated because of the illegitimate release of those documents. Have I put that right?

Secretary Matthews: No that is not true. Not because of illegitimate release but it was because of what was in the endorsement and the manner in which he handled it . . . the release had nothing to do except in so far as it indicated a lack of control of his own office.⁶⁴⁰

Secretary Matthews also testified that he believed Admiral Denfeld was "in opposition to things I had publicly announced and the policies in which I believed," clearly meaning unification.⁶⁴¹ Based on the available excerpts, Matthews' primary reasons for firing the CNO were their philosophical differences on unification and the Secretary's concern about Denfeld's ability to administer his office effectively.

On 1 February, Drew Pearson gave some details about the closed hearings based on "inside Senate sources." Pearson reported that Matthews believed Admiral Denfeld had played a part in the Crommelin incidents and asserted that the CNO's signing a blank endorsement to the Bogan letter persuaded the Secretary that this "double-dealing" behavior "had to be stopped immediately."⁶⁴² This article was the only public hint that Matthews had any reservations about Admiral Denfeld's abilities. The Secretary's letter to the President had not indicated any problem with Denfeld's performance or talents. In fact, in a 28 January 1950, "Meet the Press" interview, Matthews stated that "I was very careful not to criticize Admiral Denfeld in any particular . . . [and was] careful to see that he kept his rank as a full Admiral."⁶⁴³ Historians are unlikely ever to determine whether this hesitancy publicly to criticize Denfeld was based on friendship or a very "lawyer-like"

⁶⁴⁰Excerpt from Secretary Matthews' discussion before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 30 January 1950, in letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, p. 7, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶⁴¹Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁴²Drew Pearson, "Talk About Dissension in the Navy," Washington Post, 1 February 1950, p. 12-F.

⁶⁴³Transcript of Secretary Matthews' interview on "Meet the Press," 28 January 1950, pp. 6 and 9, in the Matthews Papers, File "Speeches," Truman Library.

fear of possible slander charges. Nonetheless, Matthews' interview revealed a performance dimension to Admiral Denfeld's removal not previously publicized.

The ex-CNO strenuously objected to many of the Secretary's statements. He told Senator Knowland that "there are in the record which you sent me many contradictions and inaccurate observations, revealing, I regret to say, the unfamiliarity of the Secretary of the Navy with the simplest procedures of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations."⁶⁴⁴ The Admiral singled out Matthews' concerns over the blank endorsement as particularly ill-founded. Regarding unification, Denfeld wrote that "I have always been for unification and did my level best to make it work satisfactorily."⁶⁴⁵ He thereby repeated statements he had made in Congressional testimony and again when he announced his decision to retire.⁶⁴⁶ No matter how much Denfeld protested, he continued to be labeled as an opponent of unification.

Equally revealing are Denfeld's comments that he had become convinced after his testimony that he would be fired because he "felt that the Secretary's attitude was such that we could not get along together."⁶⁴⁷ Admiral Denfeld also indicated that he "was particularly bitter about the manner" by which he had been informed of his removal. "At that time [28 October] I was not sure of the part the Secretary had played in having me removed, because he had not kept me informed of what he was doing."⁶⁴⁸ Denfeld's statement to Senator Knowland much more explicitly addressed the firing than did comments he later published. He therein presented a detailed explanation of the circumstances surrounding his endorsement of Vice Admiral Bogan's letter and concluded

⁶⁴⁴Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, p. 2, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁴⁶His 19 January 1950 press statement included the following line on unification: "I have always been for it and believe it would work out." (Omaha World Herald, 20 January 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews.")

⁶⁴⁷Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, p. 8, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶⁴⁸*Ibid.*

that "in spite of the Crommelin incident and the Bogan letter, the decision to remove me was made as a result of my testimony."⁶⁴⁹ This conclusion is consistent with the Admiral's other statements. What is unusual is the seemingly unconscious highlighting of the poor communications which existed between Matthews and Denfeld. This situation, even without the other issues, could have justified Matthews' decision to change CNOs.

Admiral Denfeld's letter to Senator Knowland stated that the House Armed Services Committee had requested a copy of the Secretary's testimony of 30 January to facilitate their evaluation of the hearings and the firing of the CNO. Understandably, the Admiral requested that a copy of his submission be forwarded to Chairman Vinson's Committee along with the other material.⁶⁵⁰ This request seems reasonable, but, based on the House's final report issued on 1 March, neither Matthews' nor Denfeld's statements were ever given to the House. Communications problems were not confined to the Navy.

Matthews continued to demonstrate his feelings of friendship for the fired Admiral. When the Commander of the Boston Naval District, Rear Admiral Thebaud, asked the Secretary if he could plan a standard retirement ceremony for the ex-CNO given the possibility for negative publicity, Matthews responded very positively. He "heartily approved" of Rear Admiral Thebaud's plans and authorized the typical honors for someone retiring with four stars, but he made no mention of any award for the CNO for his years of dedicated service.⁶⁵¹ There were other indications that relations between the two men were not close at all. John Floberg, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air since November 1949, recalled that "the feelings of animosity between those two incidentally, were highly reciprocal. I was on good terms with both of them, but there was

⁶⁴⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁵⁰Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁵¹Letter from Rear Admiral Thebaud to Captain Ruble (Secretary Matthews' Aide), 27 January 1950, and letter from Captain Ruble to Rear Admiral Thebaud, 31 January 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

certainly no love lost between them."⁶⁵² What comes out of a complete review of their correspondence and statements during this period is a sense that they had enjoyed a good personal relationship, but the firing had transformed their friendship into mere surface civility.

Matthews and Denfeld spent February 1950 waiting for the House's report to put the firing to bed. Tensions remained high given Vinson's earlier pronouncements and the many telegrams and letters from members of his Committee supportive of Denfeld's position and the principle of free testimony. The Navy Secretary was still smarting from Senator McCarthy's accusations in the Senate and almost became involved in a fist fight with the ex-Marine from Wisconsin when they met at a Washington party. Amazingly, only the timely intervention of Secretary Symington prevented physical violence.⁶⁵³

Matthews' patience with the entire issue was wearing thin. He was uncharacteristically harsh in his 8 February response to J. D. Ryan's criticism of his decision to fire the CNO: "I am giving you the foregoing with the suggestion that before you pass judgment on something you know nothing about, you secure a knowledge of the facts involved."⁶⁵⁴

Denfeld maintained a low profile, waiting until his retirement to begin a public campaign to reverse the Navy's fortunes. He hoped that Congressman Vinson would continue to support his position. In his 9 February letter to Senator Knowland he justified his Congressional testimony by claiming that he would "have been derelict" in his duty if he had altered his convictions "to suit the expediencies of the moment."⁶⁵⁵ Concerning the Bogan endorsement and the commission issue, he complained that

⁶⁵²Letter from Assistant Secretary John Floberg to Paolo Coletta, 1976, quoted in Paolo E. Coletta, The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953, (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), p. 208.

⁶⁵³George Dixon, "First McCarthy vs. Matthews Meeting Almost Exploded," Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch, 21 February 1950.

⁶⁵⁴Letter from Secretary Matthews to J. D. Ryan of Larchmont, New York, 8 February 1950, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

⁶⁵⁵Letter from Admiral Denfeld to Senator Knowland, p. 1, in the Matthews Papers, File "Denfeld," Truman Library.

all these minor circumstances have been magnified out of all proportion with the result that the real point in this case is beclouded, namely, that I was punished for having expressed my honest convictions before a committee of the Congress of the United States.⁶⁵⁶

The long-awaited House Report on the Hearings on Unification and Strategy was issued on 1 March 1950. Its 58-page narrative summary is a masterpiece of dispassionate analysis. Vinson thereby provided a report which avoided placing Congress in the position of evaluating military weapons or constructing war plans, even though much of the testimony seemed to ask for the House Committee's vote on these issues. The report encouraged the services to settle their differences through training and mutual respect rather than public argument. It supported the assessment of weapons such as the B-36 by the Department's Weapons System Evaluation Group, criticized the National Security Council for failing to provide the JCS with an adequate national security strategy to support military planning, and pointed out many specific areas where unification could be improved. The report concluded by stating that the Committee found "no unification Puritans in the Pentagon."⁶⁵⁷

The report urged the services to "resolve their professional differences fairly and without rancor and to perform their professional duties . . . with dignity, with decorum, and" with due respect to the other services' views.⁶⁵⁸ It praised the "extended frank and honest testimony" and recognized that petty rivalry was not the cause of the disagreements but rather "a genuine inability for these services to agree, fundamentally and professionally, on the art of warfare."⁶⁵⁹ Noting the emotional moments during and after the hearings, the report labeled the witnesses "patriotic men" and characterized the

⁶⁵⁶Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁵⁷House Unification and Strategy Report, pp. 1 - 42.

⁶⁵⁸Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁵⁹Ibid., p. 33.

"captious criticism of such men" as "unworthy and a disservice to the Nation's defense."⁶⁶⁰ Only one of the report's 33 conclusions was not approved unanimously - its characterization of the firing of Admiral Denfeld as a reprisal for his testimony.

Much of the report dealt with the fundamental issue of the freedom of witnesses to testify without fear before Congress. Three pages were devoted to describing the assurances given by Matthews and Johnson that there would be no reprisals. The Committee stated that if free testimony was hindered, "effective representative government in this country [would be] gravely imperiled."⁶⁶¹ Given this understanding, 23 of the Committee's 31 members supported the finding that

the removal of Admiral Denfeld was a reprisal against him for giving testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. This act is a blow against effective representative government in that it tends to intimidate witnesses and hence discourages the rendering of free and honest testimony to the Congress; it violated promises made to the witnesses by the Committee, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of Defense; and it violated the Unification Act, into which a provision was written to specifically prevent actions of this nature against the Nation's highest military and naval officers.⁶⁶²

The report expands on this finding, stating that "the Committee deeply regrets and deplores this retaliation against a witness who gave a committee of Congress, at its request, his honest, frank and candid views of matters of great national importance."⁶⁶³ The document rejects the arguments that "some more distant cause" led to Denfeld's removal, and warns that if this type of reprisal is repeated, "the Committee will ask the Congress to exercise its constitutional power of redress."⁶⁶⁴

The eight dissenting Representatives on the House Armed Services Committee issued a supplemental explanation of why they did not think Admiral Denfeld's removal

⁶⁶⁰Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁶¹Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁶²Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁶³Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁶⁴Ibid.

was a "reprisal." All eight Congressmen were Democrats: Kilday (Texas), Havenner (Calif.), Price (Ill.), Fisher (Texas), Green (Pa.), Walsh (Ind.), Clemente (N.Y.), and Doyle (Iowa). Four of them had previously served in the Army or the Air Force, and another had had a son killed in World War II with the Army Air Corps.⁶⁶⁵ Their statement noted Secretary Matthews' "carefully weighed words" in his letter to the President and concluded that "there is absolutely nothing before the Committee, privately or publicly, to controvert this statement of the Secretary of the Navy." Taking a very legalistic approach, the group decided that the Committee's conclusion was based entirely on "*a priori* reasoning" and that it had made the Secretary appear to have been a liar.⁶⁶⁶

It is difficult to argue with this minority opinion's logic. The Committee had held no new hearings following the firing of the CNO and had not even obtained copies of Matthews' January testimony before the Senate on this issue, yet most of its members felt adequately informed to judge the motivation of Secretary Matthews. The dissenting statement contended that although the Secretary of the Navy had "adequately settled the matter" in his Senate hearing, "the House Armed Services Committee has reached a diametrically opposite conclusion without hearing the testimony of the Secretary of the Navy against whom the verdict is rendered." Neither side mentioned the fact that Admiral Denfeld had not been given any opportunity to air his views on this matter. The eight Representatives concluded their statement by asserting, "this is an unsound manner in which to conduct public business. It is prejudging a case without hearing the evidence. It is assuming, not proving, the facts of a case."⁶⁶⁷

Because the House Committee was not a court and delivered no legal verdict, it was not required to cite evidence in support of its 1 March report. Nevertheless, the Committee's credibility suffered greatly from the perception that it was only based on

⁶⁶⁵Congressional Directory: 81st Congress, 1st Session, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949).

⁶⁶⁶House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 57.

⁶⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 58.

rumor and supposition. The Omaha World Herald supported the minority opinion and concluded that the report was "manifestly unfair" on its characterization of the Denfeld firing as a reprisal.⁶⁶⁸ Even the ten Representatives in the majority who advocated turning the matter over to the Justice Department agreed that only "a *prima facie* case" had been made.⁶⁶⁹ For whatever reason, Vinson's Committee had chosen to take an aggressive stand against the civilian leadership of the Defense Department based on supposition and circumstantial evidence.

The ten Congressmen who urged the Justice Department to look into the firing included nine Republicans and one Democrat, Hebert of Louisiana. The Republicans in this group included Representatives Arends, Cole, and Van Zandt who had played prominent roles in earlier stages of the hearings. Their recommendation followed the defeat of a motion in Committee to seek criminal action against Secretary Matthews for injuring a witness.⁶⁷⁰ The ten believed that he had violated Title 18 of section 1505 of the United States Criminal Code, "Influencing or Injuring Witness Before Agencies and Committees." It authorized a maximum penalty of \$5,000 and/or five years imprisonment for injuring "any party or witness in his person or property on account of his . . . testifying or having testified."⁶⁷¹

This recommendation seems to have been the most legally correct of the three because it made no attempt to pass judgment without evidence or reject out of hand any possibility of impropriety. This group made the logical recommendation to pass the investigation of this matter to an agency which was authorized to investigate possible criminal acts and determine possible legal action based on the available evidence:

⁶⁶⁸"The Navy is a Team," Omaha World Herald, 3 March 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁶⁶⁹House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 58.

⁶⁷⁰The vote on this motion was 21 to 11. John Jarrell, "Denfeld Case Was Reprisal," Omaha World Herald, 1 March 1950, in the Douglas County [Nebraska] Historical Society, File "Matthews."

⁶⁷¹House Unification and Strategy Report, p. 58.

we do not question the powers inherent in the executive establishment to transfer or demote personnel. Nor do we attempt to pass judgment on the motives which may have actuated those in responsible positions We simply state that a *prima facie* case has been made which indicates that the statutes of the United States relating to the protection of witnesses may have been violated.⁶⁷²

Although this option appears in hindsight to have been the most logical of the choices open to Congressman Vinson, he elected to merely state his majority opinion that Matthews had fired Denfeld as a reprisal, and take no action on any further investigation. There is no evidence that the Justice Department ever made any attempt to look into the matter, and the two houses of Congress made no effort to reconcile their different interpretations of the firing of Admiral Denfeld.

The ex-CNO was now retired and free to openly express his frustrations. Denfeld chose to issue a series of three articles in Collier's magazine to tell his side of the firing and to try to convince the American people that the Navy's position in the hearings had been correct. His first piece, "Why I Was Fired," appeared in the 18 March 1950 issue of this magazine and is a concise and factual representation of his impressions of the circumstances involved in his removal. The only significant omissions are the Admiral's signing of the blank endorsement to Bogan's letter and Admiral Sherman's role in the hearings. Denfeld never directly criticized the President, the Secretary of Defense, or the Secretary of the Navy, preferring to keep his points professional and respectful. He defended his record on unification by asserting that "no one can say that . . . I did not do my level best to make unification work."⁶⁷³ Despite his strong support for an unpopular position, Denfeld felt he had received only "contemptuous treatment" at the hands of his civilian supervisors. Regarding the charge that he did not demonstrate sufficient loyalty,

⁶⁷²Ibid., p. 59.

⁶⁷³Denfeld, "Why I Was Fired," p. 64.

he wrote that "a superior cannot expect loyalty from his subordinates unless he gives it in full measure. And one essential of loyalty . . . [is] common everyday politeness."⁶⁷⁴

Denfeld describes himself as "the first victim of the reprisal" and asserts that "there is not the slightest doubt that the reason for my removal was my testimony."⁶⁷⁵ He based this conclusion on his sense that relations between himself and the Navy Secretary had been good until he had testified before Congress. He acknowledged the Secretary's statement at their 4 October meeting concerning his continued usefulness as CNO, but believes that the words were not meant to indicate that the Secretary had decided to remove him. Regarding his future, Denfeld notes that he had been urged to run for political office, but "I have no thought of doing so. The last thing I want to do is become a political issue."⁶⁷⁶ This concern seems incredible given the political firestorm which his statement and firing had already produced.

"Why I Was Fired" presents the Admiral's case well, but not so comprehensively and forthrightly as his private letter to Senator Knowland had done. His omission of the blank endorsement issue and reticence to criticize the Navy's civilian leaders weakened this article. All incidents therein described support the conclusion that a leadership vacuum existed in the Navy and that a communication breakdown between the CNO and the Navy's senior officers caused the former's removal.

The Admiral's second article appeared on 25 March and was titled "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK." It concentrated on the circumstances surrounding the cancellation of the U.S.S. United States and the functioning of unification in the Department of Defense. More directly than the Admiral's first submission, it included some emotional descriptions and accusations about the participants in the cancellation of the carrier. Denfeld came very close to calling Secretary Johnson a liar in refuting the

⁶⁷⁴Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 13 and 64.

⁶⁷⁶Ibid., p. 63.

Defense Secretary's statement that he had read all the Joint Chiefs' statements on the carrier project by Friday, 22 April. The ex-CNO claimed that his draft hadn't even been completed until late on that day, and reports that he "was never able to find any official record indicating that he [Johnson] was given the Joint Chiefs' views before . . . April 23rd."⁶⁷⁷ Denfeld offers several recommendations for improving the operation of the Defense Department, including the adding of the Commandant of the Marine Corps to the JCS, and adopting a new law to require Congressional approval for any "administrative cutbacks" in approved defense budgets.⁶⁷⁸

In his third and final article, the retired Admiral focused on the future. "The Nation NEEDS the Navy" attempts to justify the requirement for a strong sea service by analyzing the various missions assigned to the Navy and assessing the forces required to accomplish them. Denfeld points out that "we have a tremendous fleet - in mothballs," and continues his advocacy for each service to control the use of its allocated funds, rather than allowing a 2-to-1 vote in the JCS to restrict vital weapons development projects.⁶⁷⁹ In the realm of strategic planning, he writes that "the Navy has been plagued by having its strategy dictated by nonprofessionals who are ignorant of the conduct of warfare in general, and by others who know nothing of the Navy or its use of air power."⁶⁸⁰ Sadly, Denfeld's arguments all appeared to object to civilian control and unification, no matter how many times he claimed to have supported these principles.

Secretary Matthews declined to comment on Denfeld's Collier's pieces, but did ruffle some feathers with a March speech in Denfeld's home state. The Navy Secretary was effusive in his praise for the great job Admiral Sherman was doing to restore order to the Department. Admiral Denfeld refused to comment on this matter.⁶⁸¹ By this time,

⁶⁷⁷Denfeld, "The ONLY CARRIER the Air Force Ever SANK," p. 46.

⁶⁷⁸Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁷⁹Denfeld, "The Nation NEEDS the Navy," p. 44.

⁶⁸⁰Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁸¹"Denfeld Tight-Lipped on Navy Chief's Blast," Boston American, 15 March 1950, p. 11.

Denfeld had decided to run for the Republican nomination as Governor of Massachusetts and was forced to repress his personal feelings in the interest of his campaign. Secretary Matthews had begun to feel much more confident in his position after having weathered the "Revolt of the Admirals" with flying colors.

In early 1950, the Defense Department began to recover from the bitter hearings. The Weapons System Evaluation Group finally presented its assessment of the current strategic bombing plans to the President in January. Its report concluded that the "atomic blitz" strategy "could be carried out presently only in theory" and estimated a 30 to 50 percent B-36 attrition rate on the initial missions.⁶⁸² It went on to note the lack of reliable intelligence on Soviet air defenses and generally echoed all of Denfeld's concerns about this plan. In yet another indication of the poor communications in the Nation's defense leadership, a witness to this briefing recorded that "as the briefing ended, Johnson exclaimed, 'There, I told you they'd say the B-36 is a good plane,' but Truman looked disgusted and snapped, 'no damnit, they said just the opposite.'"⁶⁸³ Even an 18 month evaluation could not settle this basic question or bring the Defense leadership together.

The Navy made several notable changes after Denfeld's removal. Admiral Sherman recognized the poor job that the Navy's public relations office had done during the unification controversies and overhauled its organization along lines Admiral Denfeld's friend Captain Karig had recommended. The newly created "Chief of Naval Information" would work directly for the CNO in the future.⁶⁸⁴ In an amazing turnaround, Johnson approved the construction of a new aircraft carrier on 22 June 1950, only three days before the North Korean attack. This new vessel was to be named after Secretary Forrestal and, although not the revolutionary flush-deck type that Denfeld had wanted, was capable of carrying modern jet aircraft.⁶⁸⁵ Even using its existing carriers, the Navy

⁶⁸²Rearden, p. 409.

⁶⁸³Ibid., p. 410.

⁶⁸⁴Coletta, The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947 - 1953, p. 214.

⁶⁸⁵"Navy Carrier Has Go-Ahead," Omaha World Herald, 23 June 1950, p. 1.

began taking nuclear weapons to sea with attack aircraft in February 1950 and has continued to deploy a sea-based nuclear capability to this day.⁶⁸⁶ Admiral Sherman was proving capable of getting done what Denfeld had only dreamed of doing, but it will never be known if this was due to his own performance or was merely a consequence of his predecessor's personal sacrifice.

The outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 highlighted many other deficiencies in the Nations' defense structure. Truman's and Johnson's economy plan had been based on the premise that there would be no war in the near future. Now that they had been proven wrong, the President allowed his Defense Secretary to take most of the criticism for the lack of preparedness. Because Johnson had already fallen out of favor with the President due to what the President saw as his "egotistical desire to run the entire government" and his poor performance in managing the Defense Department, Truman requested his resignation on 19 September 1950.⁶⁸⁷ Rear Admiral Dennison stated that one reason why Truman decided to remove Johnson was his displeasure at Johnson's part in the firing of Admiral Denfeld.⁶⁸⁸ Although never publicly acknowledged, the poor grades given the B-36 by the Weapons System Evaluation Group and the demonstration of the Navy's utility following the Korean attack had validated much of Denfeld's position and discredited his opponents.

Secretary Matthews eventually outlasted both Johnson and Admiral Sherman but not by much. Admiral Denfeld's successor died of a sudden heart attack in July 1951 after having done a spectacular job in his brief tenure as CNO. Secretary Matthews stayed on but was removed by the President at the end of this same month for having "indiscreetly called for a preventive war against the Soviet Union."⁶⁸⁹ Matthews was given the post of

⁶⁸⁶Vincent Davis, Postwar Defense Policy and the U. S. Navy, 1943 - 1946, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), p. 256.

⁶⁸⁷McCullough, p. 792.

⁶⁸⁸Dennison interview, p. 142.

⁶⁸⁹Potter, Nimitz, p. 448.

Ambassador to Ireland but only lived until October 1952. Within three years of Denfeld's removal, his strategic concepts had come back into favor and his opponents had been discredited, yet his reputation did not recover.

The ex-CNO failed in his quest to become the Governor of Massachusetts and settled in as the Shell Oil Company's Washington office manager, a position he retained until his death in March 1972. He held various voluntary jobs including President of the Naval Academy's Alumni Association from July 1951 through 1955, but never regained his national prominence. In 1951, he joined Leahy, Nimitz, Halsey, King, Radford, Blandy, and Spruance as honorary pall bearers at Admiral Sherman's funeral, but he never joined these legendary naval heroes in the history books.⁶⁹⁰ The Navy named entire classes of ships after Leahy, Nimitz, Sherman, Forrestal and Burke, and individual combatant vessels for Blandy, Conolly, and even Crommelin, but Denfeld's name has not even graced the stern of a yard tug.⁶⁹¹ Even President Truman was honored in 1995 by having named after him an aircraft carrier twice as big as the "supercarrier" he had canceled in 1949. Admiral Denfeld was left to take comfort in his real achievements which had generally been obscured by the enduring ignominy of the "Revolt of the Admirals."

The inter-service rivalry of the 1940s continues somewhat muted to the present day. A 1993 U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings article actually called for another "Admirals' Revolt" to oppose the Army's and Air Force's efforts to redistribute the roles and missions of the Armed Services.⁶⁹² The Navy Times observed in March 1994 that these conflicts "are deeply ingrained and seemingly intractable, and every now and then they manifest themselves in bizarre ways."⁶⁹³ Another March 1994 newspaper article,

⁶⁹⁰"Admiral Sherman Laid to Rest," Shipmate, September 1951, p. 6.

⁶⁹¹Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, 8 vols., (Washington: Naval History Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1991).

⁶⁹²James L. George, "Where's the Admirals' Revolt?" U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, May 1993, pp. 66-71.

⁶⁹³Navy Times, 14 March 1994, p. 31.

titled "Navy, Air Force in Power Struggle Bombers vs. Carriers," would certainly not have seemed unusual Denfeld's day.⁶⁹⁴ In 1994, Admiral Boorda, the CNO, employed a football analogy borrowed from General Bradley's "Fancy Dans" speech and reiterated Admiral Denfeld's basic arguments in stating that "we can't put all our money into defense, offense, or special teams . . . We have to be good at all three or we will lose. One player, or set of players, will not win the Super Bowl . . . it takes 'em all."⁶⁹⁵ Neither Admiral Denfeld's efforts as a conciliator nor his courageous stand in the Congressional hearings were able to materially effect the course of this debate. Many of 1949's passionate issues and philosophical differences continue to dominate the Department in 1995.

⁶⁹⁴"Navy, Air Force in Power Struggle Bombers vs. Carriers," Norfolk Virginian Pilot, 21 March 1994, p. 1.

⁶⁹⁵Jeremy M. Boorda, Admiral USN, "Naval Service Day Presentation, CNO Brief to the Roles and Missions Commission, 20 September 1994," Copy of briefing slides in author's possession.

CONCLUSION

Admiral Denfeld was a man of conscience, committed to the defense of his Nation and the best interests of his service. He was placed in the extremely difficult position of having to implement the President's passionate desire for military unification while maintaining the morale and efficiency of his subordinates who were not convinced of the wisdom of this course. Denfeld appeared to compromise and postpone wherever possible, thereby acting as an impediment to progress rather than a constructive force for change or restraint. He neglected to keep his subordinates informed of his efforts and compromises, thereby causing them to lose confidence in his leadership and eventually so exasperating them that they took matters into their own hands.

Compounding these difficulties, the CNO seems to have failed in communicating clearly and promptly both up and down the chain of command. All evidence indicates that Denfeld and Matthews liked each other personally but never understood each other professionally. This divided and dysfunctional leadership team was doomed to fail. Matthews was an intelligent and patriotic individual who was far from being Johnson's loyal lackey. If the Admiral and the Secretary had been able to agree on a consistent and compelling policy, the history of the Defense Department in the year before the Korean War probably would have been less chaotic and painful. The poor communications between Denfeld and Matthews hamstrung the Navy and justified a change in CNOs.

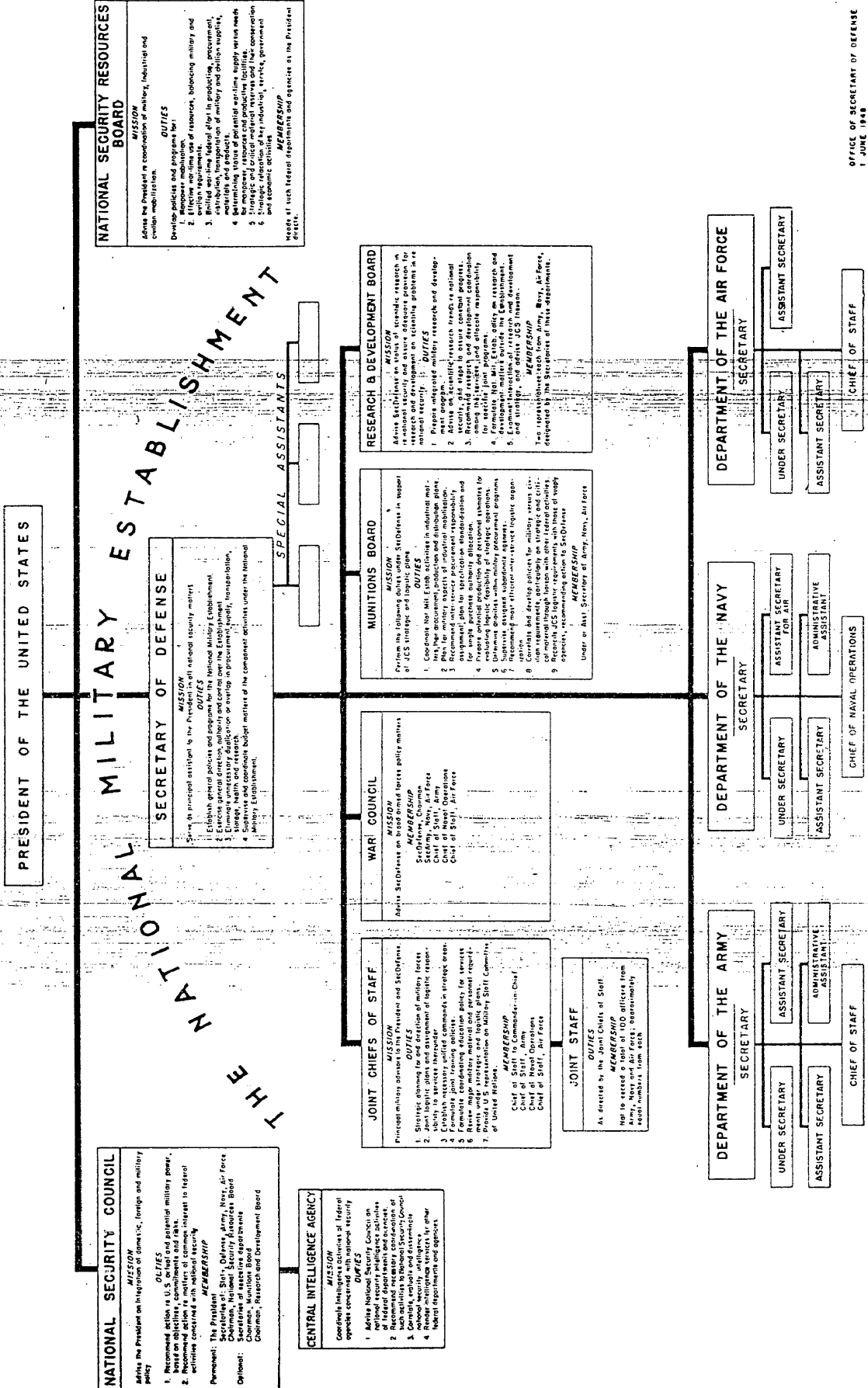
Secretary Matthews' greatest mistake in dealing with the firing was his having explained his decision too much like a lawyer and not enough like a statesman. His public contention that the Bogan endorsement alone caused him to decide to remove Denfeld certainly could not have been disproved but was not persuasive. Matthews' private mention of Denfeld's mismanagement allowed the Secretary to convince the Senate that he was acting properly while protecting Denfeld's reputation. But this strategy did not have

any impact on the House, the Navy, or the public. Matthews seems to have forgotten that he was no longer in an insulated courtroom with a twelve-person jury. The verdict on his conduct was delivered by millions of citizens who had no knowledge of all the information concerning Denfeld's performance at Matthews' disposal. His misjudgment hurt the President and the country by unnecessarily adding fuel to the already-burning fire of inter-service rivalry.

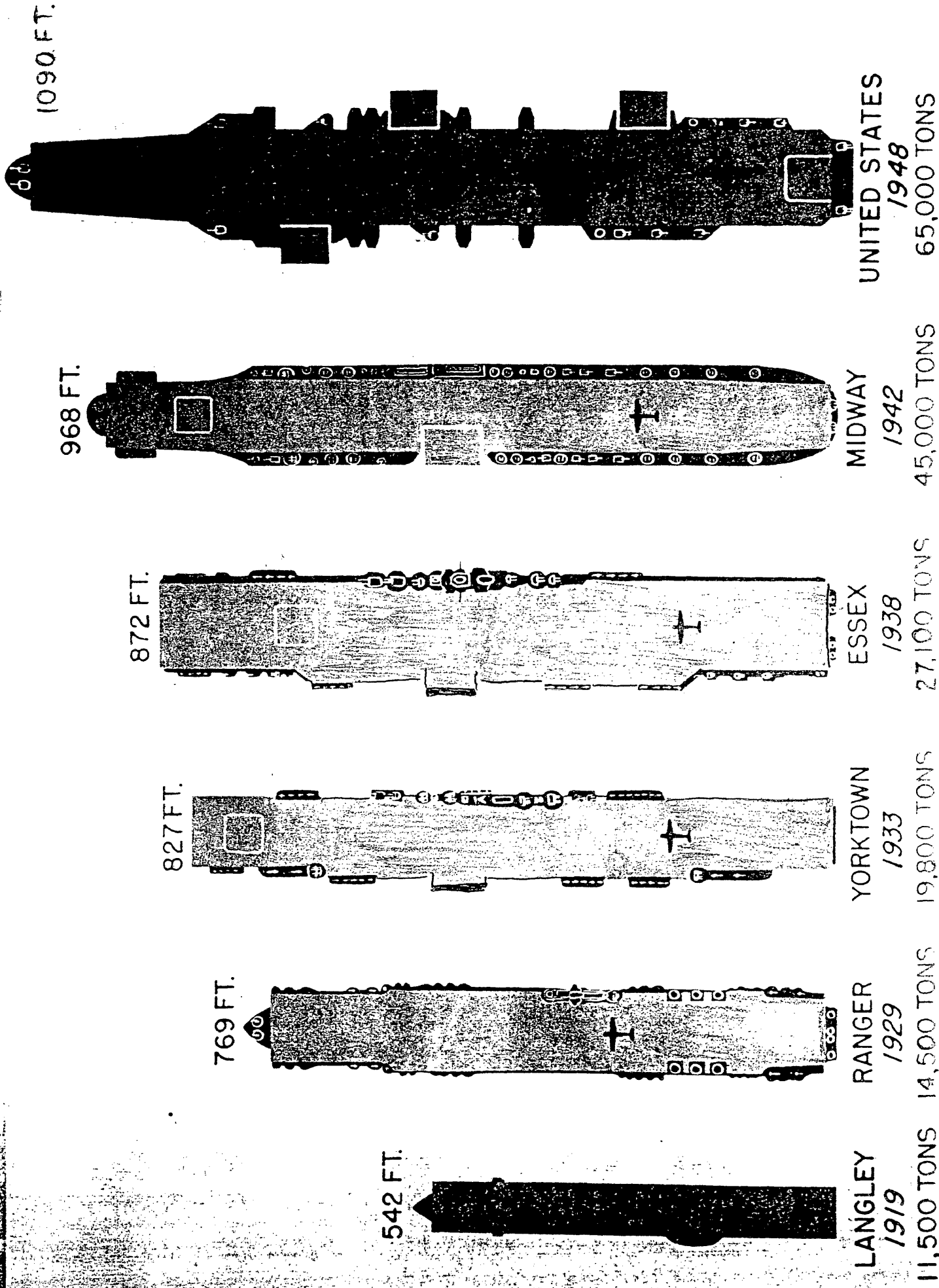
Admiral Denfeld was a good strategist and a capable naval officer. He made a sincere and dedicated effort to protect the best interests of the Nation but was not enough of a motivational team-builder to dispel the festering anger among naval officers over what they believed to be funding for an ineffective weapon - the B-36 - and Secretary Johnson's favoritism toward the Air Force. Denfeld's ineffective leadership and inability to communicate his ideas and concerns to both his subordinates and superiors inevitably led to his downfall. The testimony he delivered during the Congressional hearings on unification and strategy was courageous and, for the most part, accurate. It was not the cause of his removal. It does facilitate assessment of Matthews' decision to fire the CNO to the extent that it reveals poor coordination at the highest levels of the Navy Department. Admiral Denfeld failed as a communicator and as a leader; and Matthews was unable to make the transition from lawyer to statesman. Both Admiral Denfeld and Secretary Matthews, as individuals, deserve far more thorough and objective historical evaluation than they have heretofore received. But, as a team, their accomplishments were sadly deficient. The CNO's firing was driven by personality conflicts and perceived administrative deficiencies, not by any dramatic insubordination or disloyalty.

ORGANIZATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

Chart A



DEVELOPMENT OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

27 October 1949

Dear Mr. President:

When I became Secretary of the Navy on May twenty-fifth of this year, I did so realizing that because of certain conditions then existing in the Department of the Navy and which we discussed at that time, the administration of the duties of Secretary would involve grave difficulties. Events which have since transpired have more than justified that apprehension.

You will remember that in our preliminary consideration of my appointment as Secretary, you emphasized that vital importance of the successful implementation of the Unification Act of 1947, as enacted by Congress. I then advised you of my unqualified approval of the policy of unification as embodied in that Act and in the proposed amendments to the law which you had submitted to Congress. Furthermore, I pledged my best efforts as Secretary to assist the Navy to function in the utmost good faith as a full member in the Unified Defense Team.

You carefully pointed out how essential it would be to have the proper military personnel in key positions, up to and including Chief of Naval Operations, in order to attain that much desired result.

You also stated that you would cooperate that, as Secretary, I might be supported at all times by individuals of my own selection in positions of every important subordinate capacity.

Very soon after I assumed office, it became evident to me that there was definite resistance on the part of some naval officers to accepting unification of the Armed Services, notwithstanding the fact that it was established by law. That condition was reflected by public and private statements from various sources and by other methods. Some of the individuals involved in those procedures held very important assignments in the Navy.

For reasons which I feel adequate, I refrained from promptly bringing that situation to your official attention as Commander in Chief.

27 October 1949

One of the first duties to confront me as Secretary was the selection of an appointee to succeed Admiral Denfeld as Chief of Naval Operations for the term beginning on the fifteenth of next December. My final decision, after carefully considering various phases of the problems involved, was to recommend Admiral Denfeld for reappointment, and such a recommendation went forward to you through Secretary of Defense Johnson on August second, 1949. One of the most persuasive of the considerations which led me to make this recommendation was the value to the Navy, and to the Department of Defense, which I expected to flow from continuity of service by Admiral Denfeld.

At that time, working with Admiral Denfeld whom I highly esteem, I had every reason to believe that we were in complete agreement on all important questions affecting the administration of the Department of the Navy. I felt sure that such a harmonious relationship would continue. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that my expectation would not be realized.

On Tuesday, the fourth of this month, events had taken such a course that, in a conference had with Admiral Denfeld early that day, I frankly stated to him that I feared his usefulness as Chief of Naval Operations had terminated. You may recall that I mentioned the possibility of Admiral Denfeld's replacement in the course of our discussion in your office when I was there in company with Secretary Johnson on October fifth.

My relations as Secretary of the Navy with Admiral Denfeld as Chief of Naval Operations have finally become such that I find it increasingly difficult to work with him in the harmonious relationship which should prevail between the occupants of those two official positions.

A military establishment is not a political democracy. Integrity of command is indispensable at all times. There can be no twilight zone in the measure of loyalty to superiors and respect for authority existing between various official ranks. Inability to conform to such requirements for military stability would disqualify any of us for positions subordinate to the Commander in Chief.

The existence of the present situation prevailing between the highest civilian and the highest military officer of the Navy makes it utterly impossible for me, as Secretary of the Navy, to administer

The President

-3-

27 October 1949.

the Department of the Navy in the manner I believe vital to national security. Believing as I do in the vital importance of maintaining civilian control over the military establishment, a continuance of such a condition would be intolerable to me as Secretary of the Navy.

Reluctantly, therefore, but in accordance with what I believe to be for the good of the country, I respectfully request you as President and Commander in Chief to authorize the transfer of Admiral Denfeld to other important duties, and the selection of his successor as Chief of Naval Operations at the earliest convenient date.



Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Francis P. Matthews

The President,
The White House,
Washington, D. C.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington

October 27, 1949

MEMORANDUM FOR: Secretary of the Navy

From: The President

Over a long period of time I have devoted considerable thought to various aspects of the problem which you discuss in your letter of today's date.

The action which you recommend meets with my approval. Accordingly, I hereby authorize you to arrange for and carry out the transfer which you recommend.



/s/ Harry Truman



Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King



Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz



Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey



Admiral Louis E. Denfeld



Captain John Crommelin



Admiral Richard L. Conolly



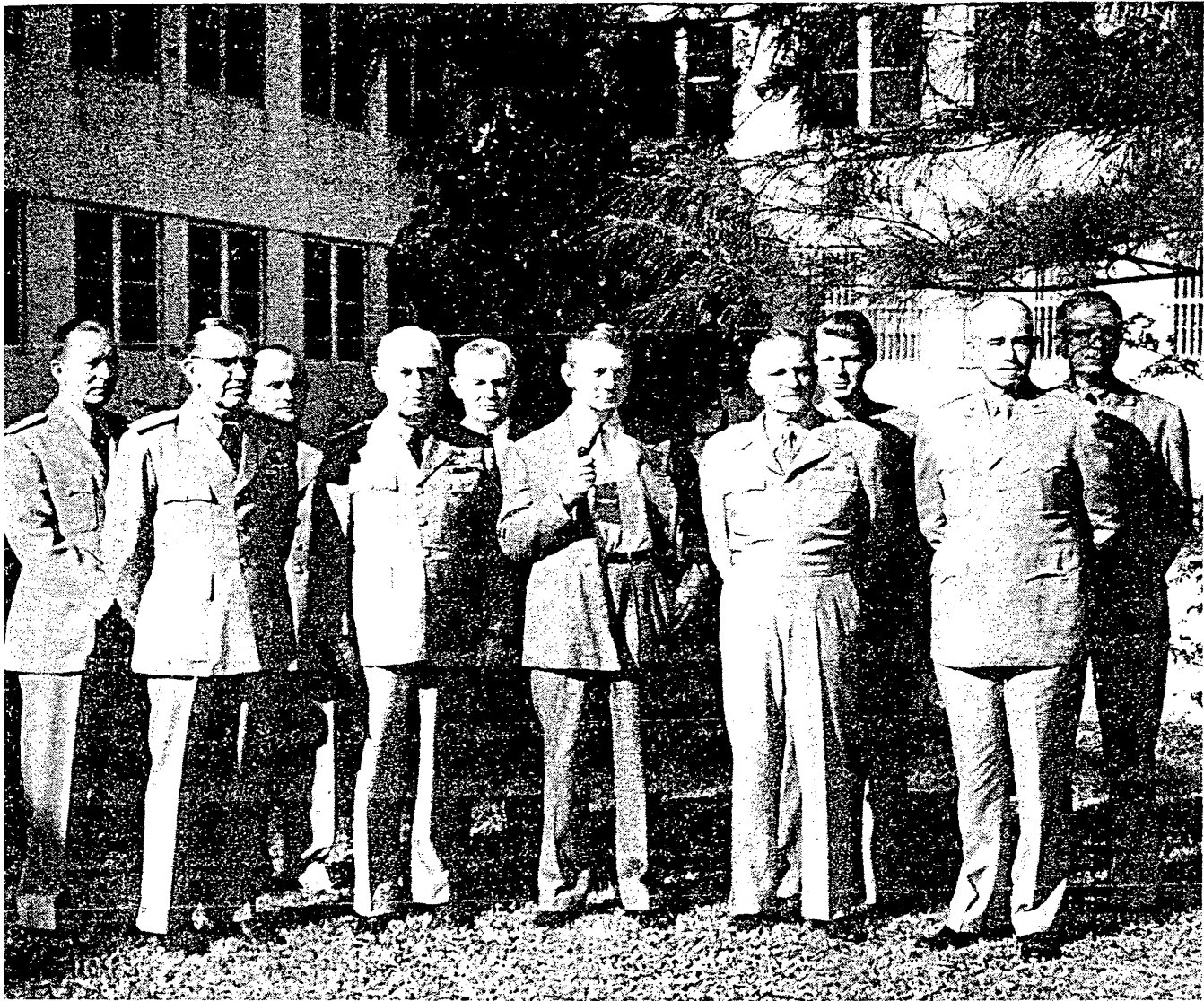
Admiral William H. P. Blandy



Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid



Admiral Arthur W. Radford



At Key West, 1948: from left, Admirals Radford and Denfeld, General Gruenther, Fleet Admiral Leahy, Assistant Secretary of Defense McNeil, Secretary of Defense Forrestal, Generals Spaatz, Norstadt, Bradley, and Wedemeyer. *Courtesy of Mrs. Arthur W. Radford*

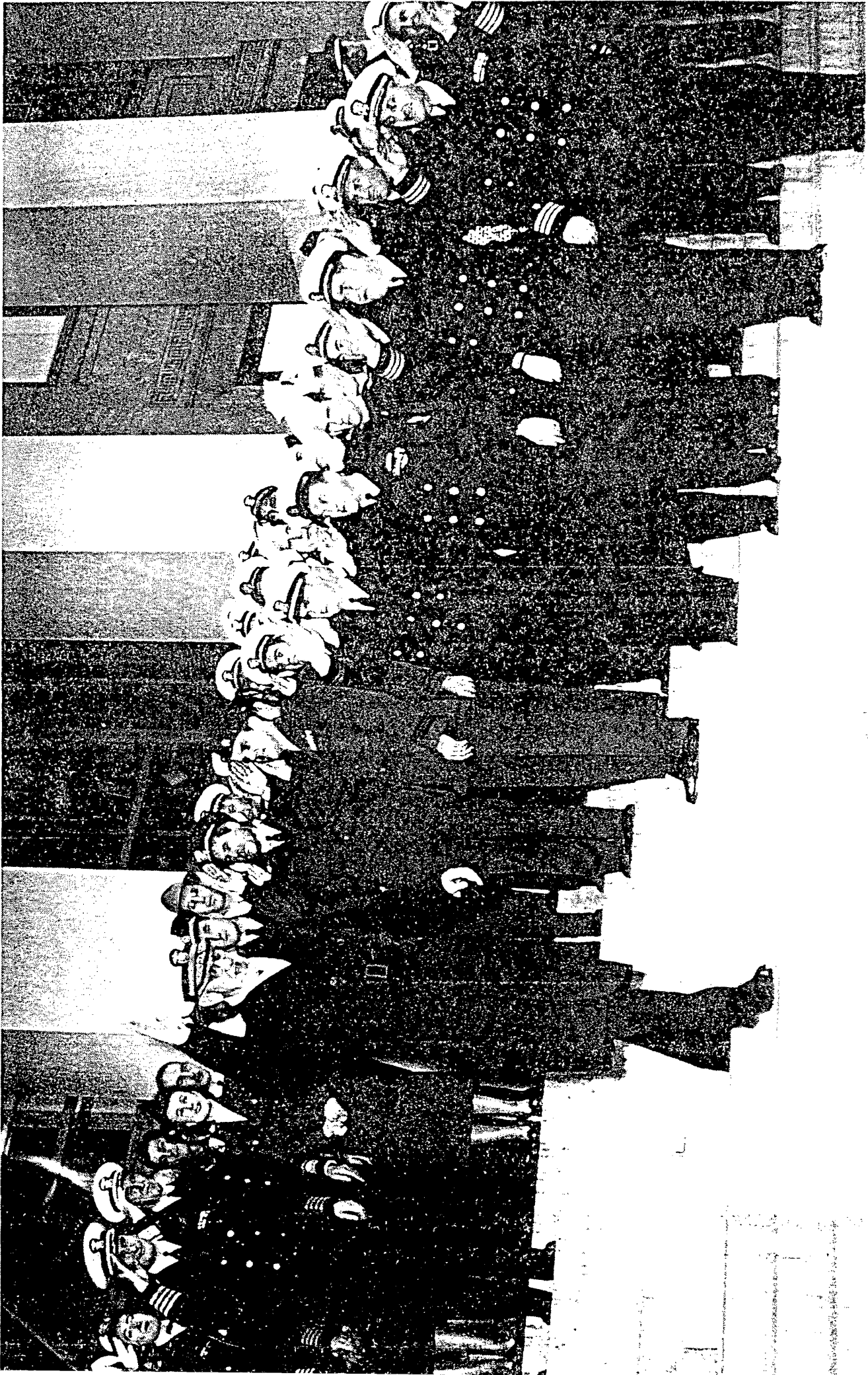
The Navy's General Staff Poses for a Picture in Washington



Members of staff created by an executive order of the President. Seated (left to right) are Vice-Admiral DeWitt C. Ramsey, vice-chief of naval operations; Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, chief of naval operations; James V. Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy; John L. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and Admiral C. P. Snyder, naval inspector general. Standing (left to right) are Rear Admiral E. W. Burroughs, head of the Navy's general planning group; Vice-Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, deputy

chief of naval operations for operations; Vice-Admiral W. H. P. Blandy, deputy chief of naval operations for special weapons; Vice-Admiral Louis E. Denfeld, deputy chief of naval operations for personnel; Vice-Admiral William S. Farber, deputy chief of naval operations for logistics; Vice-Admiral Richard L. Conolly, deputy chief of naval operations for administration, and Vice-Admiral Arthur W. Radford, deputy chief of naval operations for air

Herald Tribune—Acme



U.S.N.O. Louis Denfeld sounded off, got fired—and saluted by his staff—as he turned over the office to Sherman.



THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WILL NOW COME TO ORDER.

BRADLEY

VANDENBERG

DENFELD

COLENS

THE CHIEF OF STAFF

Foster

DENFELD CHRONOLOGY

<u>1947</u>		14 September	President Truman signed Denfeld's commission for second term as CNO
15 December	ADM Denfeld assumed duties as CNO		
<u>1948</u>		20 September	VADM Bogan wrote Secretary Matthews regarding Navy morale
11 - 14 March	Key West Conference	23 September	Truman press conference announcing Russian atomic explosion
20 - 22 Aug	Newport Conference		
<u>1949</u>		28 September	ADM Denfeld endorsed Bogan letter
28 March	Louis Johnson sworn in as SECDEF	3 October	Chairman Vinson met with Navy leaders on postponing second phase of hearings
7 April	Observance of "Service Days" cancelled	3 October	Crommelin leaked Bogan letter and endorsements
18 April	USS United States keel laying	4 October	Denfeld told by Matthews that his usefulness as CNO may have been terminated by Bogan matter
23 April	Carrier cancellation		
25 April	Secretary Sullivan resigned	5 October	Secretary Matthews mentioned the possibility of removing ADM Denfeld to the President
25 May	Francis Matthews appointed SECNAV	5 Oct - 22 Oct	House hearings on unification and strategy
9 June	House ordered investigation into the B-36 and defense unification	13 October	Denfeld testimony
25 June	RADM Gallery <u>Saturday Evening Post</u> article, "An Admiral Talks Back to the Airmen" published	15 October	Matthews met with FADM Nimitz in New York
2 August	Matthews recommended Denfeld for second term	19 October	Gen Bradley testimony, labeled admirals "Fancy Dans"
9 Aug - 25 Aug	House hearings on the B-36	27 October	Denfeld fired by President
10 August	National Security Act of 1949 passed	28 October	Denfeld and Matthews met, discuss future assignment
11 August	President Truman forwarded Denfeld's renomination to the Senate for confirmation	2 November	ADM Forrest Sherman sworn in as CNO under a recess nomination
15 August	Senate confirmed Denfeld's renomination		
10 September	CAPT Crommelin made first press statements	10 December	Denfeld informed Matthews he will not accept the European command

14 December ADM Denfeld issued formal letter stating his intention not to accept European command

1952

18 October Ambassador Matthews died

15 December ADM Denfeld's first term as CNO officially expired

1972

29 March ADM Denfeld died

1950

5 January President Truman forwarded ADM Sherman's nomination for a four year CNO term to the Senate for confirmation

12 January Secretary Matthews testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that ADM Denfeld's commission for a second term had not been issued to him

18 January Senator McCarthy accusations against Secretary Matthews ("lying or just incompetent")

18 January ADM Denfeld announced his application for retirement effective 1 March

23 January Harmon Report and WSEG Evaluation of strategic bombing briefed to President Truman

1 March House report on Unification and strategy hearings issued

25 April New carrier, USS Forrestal, authorized

25 June North Korean attack on South Korea

19 September SECDEF Johnson fired by President Truman

1951

July ADM Sherman died in office

30 July F. P. Matthews removed as SECNAV. Selected as Ambassador to Ireland

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