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THE AIR CORPS ACT OF 1926

A Study of the Legislative Process

by

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INTRODUCTORY

This study deals with Congressional consideration of Army aviation policy in the period of 1917-1926, as an exploration into the politics of national security in the United States and an analysis of the decision-making process in this field of government policy. Emphasis in this study is upon the passage of the Air Corps Act of 1926, as a case study in the Congressional determination of military policies.

Under the American system of government the responsibility and duty of final determination of military policies is shared by the executive and legislative branches. The President is the ultimate commander of the military establishment, but the size, temper and sharpness of the nation's sword is largely determined, according to American governmental structure, by the legislative branch. This branch controls not only the purse, but also has the constitutional authority for determining the organization and regulation of the armed forces. This study concerns, in large measure, not the process of military appropriations for aviation, but the legislative decisions regarding doctrines, strategy, organizations and techniques for national military security.

Such a study as this cannot meaningfully concentrate solely on the legislative history of proposed bills, hearings thereon, committee action or inaction, debate and final action, for the legislative process involves much more than the various "steps" in the passage of a bill one finds outlined in an elementary government textbook. The legislative process involves executive-legislative

relationships; it involves two-party politics; it involves the pressures of real power exerted from within and without the complicated structure of the national legislature and the military establishments. The legislative process has been accurately, if generally described by Avery Leiserson as

. . . a complex, multi-dimensional series of interactions. Among these are executive-legislative relations, public information and attitudes, conflicts and disagreements within and between interest groups and administrative agencies, cross pressures from local constituency and national party organizations upon legislators, and the hierarchical structure and symbolic relationships within the legislature itself.¹

Further, in order to gain knowledge of the process, the analyst must focus attention upon the total social context in which decisions under consideration were made in order to more fully understand the process. Obviously, then, no simplified view of Congress proposing and "making" or rejecting laws after committee consideration and floor debate is adequate to real understanding of the congressional decision-making process. It is apparent that congressional "making of laws" is by no means a smoothly mechanical procedure within a clearly defined organizational structure, but is rather an intricate pattern of the behavior of men acting out their variously defined roles as legislators and as members of several other social groupings on the partially open stage of our democratic theater.

Any analysis of decision-making within the American legislative process, even though attempting to reflect the subtleties of this series of individual and group interactions, will nonetheless be subject to the inevitable frustrations and limitations which confront the analyst of man's relation to man. This is so particularly when the period under observation is many years removed from the time of writing.

1. In Items, Social Science Research Council, No. 3, Vol. V, (Sept. 1951).

Major attention in this study is focused upon the issue of Army aviation policy in the period during and following the first World War. The subject allows an examination of how the national legislature dealt with the problems of formulating policy on the question of the development and utilization of military aircraft, or more broadly, "air power," as an instrument of providing national security. The term "air power" may be defined here simply as the means of carrying out national objectives through the use of aircraft.

The issue of the role of "air power" in the national security structure is by no means a dead one. The World War saw the development of military aircraft as weapons of war which set off a doctrinal and organizational controversy that continues to this day. One reads, for example, of the "Air Power Controversy" that rages in Washington in the spring of 1953.² The issues and the setting in the 1920s and in the early 1950s are quite different, but the question of the role of military aircraft in national security policy has remained a major one. This study focuses upon military doctrines and techniques only insofar as they are involved in the legislative process. Major concern here is with the art and science of politics rather than the art and science of warfare.

In the 1953 controversy over the Republican administration's cuts in the proposed budget for the United States Air Force, it has been observed by a military analyst that in the ensuing debate over the reduction in funds for air power, "the real question is how and by whom such decisions are to be made."³ This study is also concerned with such a question: how and by whom were such decisions made in an earlier post-war generation of decision-makers. The aim is to describe

2. See for example Hanson W. Baldwin, "Air Power Controversy," New York Times (June 9), p. 10; (June 10), p. 12; (June 11), p. 22; (June 13), p. 7.

3. Walter Millis, New York Herald Tribune (June 5, 1953), p. 16. [Italics mine],

the background, setting and main events leading up to the passage of the Air Corps Act of 1926, which as a case study will provide useful information in the analysis of legislative decision-making on the question of Army aviation policy.

Considerable portions of this study will be devoted to a description of the background and setting in which the decisions of late 1925 and 1926 were made. This is done in the belief that an adequate picture of the general atmosphere is essential to the better understanding of the processes occurring in the national legislature.

The first part of this paper will be devoted to the pre-war and war-time background and experience with military aviation. Part II is primarily a description of some prevailing concepts of national security in the United States which influenced the thinking of decision-makers regarding the military establishment. Part III contains a synthesis of the various reactions to emerging doctrines of aerial warfare by the most interested groups in the process. Part IV is devoted to the congressional consideration of military aviation legislation culminating in the Air Corps Act of 1926. In the final chapter the legislative decision-making process is analyzed and some conclusions set forth.

The development of military aircraft in the first World War presented a challenge to both the Congress and the well-established military departments, a challenge not unique in the history of governments and armies. Aircraft introduced a new medium of warfare and thus inevitably promised to upset the status quo of military organization and theory. In short, aircraft were potentially revolutionary; and potential revolutions, either political or technological, threaten existing organizations, institutions, and ways of thinking.

Yet the threat of revolution in the techniques of warfare posed by the development of military aircraft came at a time when

Americans generally felt little interest in either the doctrines or the machinery of warfare. America seemed unwilling to accept, and generally unprepared for, the role of world leadership that could have been hers at the end of the World War. National security seemed guaranteed by the protective oceans to the east and west. And although air power enthusiasts suggested with all their energy that the airplane had limited the value of these geographical bulwarks, little interest could be generated either within the military establishment or from the public. The plan for national security drafted by Woodrow Wilson was decisively rejected by the Republican leaders of the 'twenties, with a seemingly clear mandate from the voters. Yet Wilson's vision of world peace through collective security and international law had apparently inspired later Republican leaders to seek his ends through different, and more independent, means. There was a move toward the limitation of armaments, and steady efforts to bring the United States into an effective system of international arbitration. Yet in its economic policies, and in the general trend of popular sentiment, America remained in the 'twenties highly nationalistic, and generally unconcerned with world affairs. The trend was toward seeking substitutes for war, and therefore America's machinery for war, in her military establishments, suffered from general neglect. In such an atmosphere, air power radicals within the services could find little support for their enthusiastic claims, often exaggerated, for the "new dimension" in warfare - the air.

Since the Congress is by law the final legal authority for the organization and regulation of the armed forces in the United States, its reactions to this new medium of warfare provide an important area for study of the processes of our form of representative government in

dealing with such an increasingly significant problem as national military policies. The question of full utilization and development of military aircraft was the basis for extremes of opinion and hence conflicting advice to the Congress by its chief consultants. Thus has been offered fertile ground for the exploration of the legislative decision-making process, which may shed some light on current problems of decision-making concerned with national security.

During the period 1919 to 1926 Congress was subjected to intensive cross-pressures and multifarious proposals on questions of military aviation policy. The terminal year of this study, 1926, saw the climax of an evolution of what might be called a War Department "policy" on air power, with the passage of the Air Corps Act. This legislation called for a five-year development program of Army aviation, and changed the name of the Air Service to Air Corps, assigning to it by implication, if not in reality, an independent mission in warfare. This act, something of a compromise between those who desired to establish a Department of Defense or at least a "separate air force" and those who regarded the military airplane as simply an ingenuous "auxiliary" to other, more substantial military branches, gave organizational recognition to the importance of the new medium of warfare. The passage of the act did much to quell, temporarily at least, the bitter controversy which had raged within and outside the Army over the question of air power and its use.

The Congress, then, in the midst of a struggle among various interest groups competing for power, was charged with its constitutional duty of deciding upon a program for national security in the best interests of the common defense and the general welfare. A study of how and by whom such decisions were made promises to add to the knowledge of the legislative process. In chronicling the events in congressional

policy determination, it would be meaningless and relatively useless to draw simply a narrative picture of the various proposals for change in military aviation policy and describe their legislative fate. While such a task constitutes a significant part of this study, an attempt is made, simultaneously, to give a larger and more realistic picture of the total legislative setting; to depict the "whirlpool" of often conflicting interests in which legislative action revolves; and to describe as fully as possible the confluence of factors in the setting which conditioned the formulation of policy.

When dealing with abstract concepts such as the "decision-making process," and "national security," it is imperative for the writer to set forth as clearly as possible his underlying assumptions. A critical analysis of any social institution or process involves necessarily choices reflecting the writer's values. It seems essential therefore to make as explicit as possible the assumptions which underlie judgments that determined the selection of materials used for this paper. For to write even a descriptive account of the legislative process it is necessary to proceed on the basis of explicit criteria for the very selection of material.

When one speaks of "Congress and Army Air Policy" the terms themselves reflect broad generalizations. The term "Congress" for example, for the purpose of this study, needs to be made more explicit in order to analyze the decision-making within that institution regarding the role of aircraft in the nation's security organization. The concrete units of power within and outside Congress which participated in the process must be located and identified. The real locus of power and responsibility for decision-making in the structure vaguely termed "Congress" must in fact be discovered and described. The term "Army Air Policy" as well must be placed concretely within an historical

context and also within the context of the most significant prevailing concepts of national security and military organization.

Since "Legislation cannot be understood apart from the manner in which it is made,"⁴ attention has been given to as much of that process as can be uncovered from the written record and other available sources. This has necessarily involved, among other things, an examination of the motivations of the chief contestants in the legislative struggle, insofar as such motivations are made apparent or can be surmised from the record of events. Further, since "Any politician, whether legislator, administrator, or judge, whether elected or appointed, is obliged to make decisions that are guided in part by the relevant knowledge that is available to him,"⁵ the process of communication of information within and between the groups under study must be explored. This can be done for the most part only insofar as it is revealed in the information shown to be held by the participants in the process.

"National security" is also an abstraction and a relative term. In the period under consideration, in order to deal objectively with this concept, it must be clearly developed what the term meant to those charged with the responsibility and power of its achievement or preservation. How was national security defined by the principal actors in the process, and also how did they define their own roles in its attainment? It is vital in a study of decision-making on national security policies to discover how national security was conceived by those participating in the process, and to avoid the pitfall of viewing such a concept from a lofty hilltop reached by hindsight.

4. E.E. Schattschneider, Politics, Pressures and the Tariff, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953), p. 13.

5. David Truman, The Governmental Process, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 333.

The method by which this study has been undertaken is a concentration mainly on uncovering and tying together the relatively unexplored legislative history and attendant action dealing with Army air legislation following the first World War. Sources include official and unofficial reports and memoirs of individuals involved in the process; and the printed records of governmental agencies. During these years over a score of major studies, investigations, and surveys were conducted on the subject of military aviation by Congress, the President, and the military services, providing thousands of pages of testimony, commentary and general information. **Vocal** opinion, through one of the most important media for its expression, is examined in newspapers and periodicals as well as its expression by the various groups participating in the process. The record of individuals taking part in the story are explored through their own writings and personal interviews whenever either were possible and promising. Access was also had to the General William Mitchell Papers in the Library of Congress. For a full description of sources, see the bibliography.

The writer, it will be noted, has proceeded in this study on the basis of advice which was first offered many years ago and has since often gone unheeded by many scholars. This advice pointed to the danger of arriving in one's research at "an enormous over-evaluation of the forms of activity which appear in words."⁶

This study has been stimulated by the writer's interest in exploring further some general assumptions regarding national security policy which may be listed here, as follows:

1. This nation has been slow to adopt advanced techniques of warfare, and this has been specifically true in the case of military aircraft.

6. Arthur F. Bentley, The Process of Government, (Chicago: University Press, 1908), p. 180.

2. There is an inherent resistance to change in all societal institutions, as vested interests, and military establishments are peculiarly prone to this. The nature of this tendency to resist change must be understood as a significant element in the problems of formulating national security policies. This proclivity for the status quo on the part of the military led Marshal Foch to suggest: "The military mind always imagines that the next war will be on the same line as the last. This has never been the case and never will be."⁷

3. In holding the responsibility for national security there is what can be called the dilemma of executive responsibility caused by the necessity of (a) being prepared at the moment for various military eventualities, and (b) at the same time keeping up with technological progress in weapons and organization, and (c) taking into account always the myriad of factors influencing the national security.

4. There are complicating factors arising from our federal system of government and our irresponsible political party system which present obstacles to effective government planning for national security.

5. There are organizational procedures in the traditions of congressional action which are also obstacles to effective military planning and the coordination of ends and means in the quest for national security.

6. Air power, however it is defined and by whatever doctrines and techniques established for its utilization, is and has been since the first World War, a vital need for national security. This assumption does not require the acceptance of the dogmatic claims of

7. Quoted in Stefan T. Possony, Strategic Air Power, The Pattern of Dynamic Security, (Washington: The Infantry Journal Press, 1949), p. xi.

air power theorists, such as those regarding the proper role of strategic bombing. But the writer does assume that something approaching the relative concept of "command of the air" is an indispensable component to any plan for national security. No dogmatic assumption is held here, however, as to what constitutes "balanced" military forces.

Congress has been faced indirectly with the same problem that has always faced military leaders, upon whom legislators, even in democratic societies, must in reality depend for "expert" military advice. The problem has been well stated by Edward P. Warner: "Military men have to remain in continuous readiness for battle with the instruments that can be produced at the time; but they must also plan to meet the problems that will be presented by the instruments that are likely to be available in the future, so that the consequences of technical development may not take them by surprise. The pioneer advocates of air power . . . can be read to greater advantage now than when their books were published."⁸

This study, then, deals with a continuing problem of national policy. The setting for this paper is the period following the first World War. But the reader is invited to note the partial analogy between the following journalistic comments:

Is President Coolidge's economy program, so far as aviation is concerned, crippling the national defense? Does the spirit of Scrooge haunt the Government in general, and our Army and Navy air services in particular? Are the War and Navy Departments to blame for the 'niggardly' treatment of their 'stepchildren' - Army and Navy aviation? Or should Congress be blamed for the 'deplorable' situation that apparently has caused President Coolidge to appoint an investigating committee to make a sweeping study of civil and military aviation?⁹

8. Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. by Edward Meade Earle (Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 1943), p. 503.

9. Literary Digest, LXXXVII (October 10, 1925), 10.

That series of questions appeared in 1925 in a popular magazine. The following was written for the New York Times in June, 1953:

Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense, appeared before a Senate Appropriations subcommittee Monday to dispute the testimony of one of his uniformed subordinates, Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, retiring Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

General Vandenberg told the Senate group earlier that the projected cut in the Air Force budget 'would increase the risk to national security beyond the dictates of national prudence.' Mr. Wilson scouted this idea and rejected it much more forcefully and convincingly than he had in previous testimony.

Nevertheless, the issue is not dead¹⁰

Many of the issues raised in this study, although described in the setting of a past decade, are indeed "not dead." The contrasts of technology and amounts of public appropriations between then and now, as well as other elements in the national security atmosphere, are striking. But many of the fundamental issues, especially that for example of the balance between the nation's desire for "security" on the one hand and for tax reductions, on the other, are identical with those of today.

10. Hanson W. Baldwin in the New York Times (June 10, 1953), p. 12.

PART I

Military men, as well as the "average legislator," if such stereotypes are at all valid, like to think of themselves as practical men. The pragmatic approach is, almost by habit and apparently by preference, the most standard form of dealing with problems in the area of military policy. Therefore any analysis of the decision-making process in the post World War I Congresses must take into account the record and experiences of the pre-war and war period with military aviation. For how the role of military aircraft in that war was viewed by both the pragmatic politicians and the practical military men is central to the better understanding of how military policies were formulated in the period under consideration.

Since "lessons from the war" loom large in a post-war evaluation of military doctrines and organization, and condition the thinking of the military leaders who serve as the chief expert consultants to the legislators, it is essential to explore and describe here the wartime expectations, achievements and failures of the military aircraft program in the first World War. This record of pre-war and wartime experience with aviation problems forms a significant part of the background to the decisions reached about the role and organization for air power in 1926.

The expectations which were generated in 1917-1918, especially the hope that aircraft could play the vital role in bringing speedy victory over Germany, were significant impressions left upon the minds of many of the actors in the process under study. The subsequent "failure" in the aircraft production program and the achievement of such hopes made military aviation the subject of partisan congressional

investigations and aviation consequently became a political football in the post-war years of decision regarding American military air power.

In the actual aerial operations in the war for which, unfortunately, there are only scattered accounts and no adequate military history, lay the foundations for many of the later claims of air enthusiasts, as well as grounds for those who would refute such claims. Although no attempt is made to present a detailed history of United States aerial operations in the war, some of the more significant events in this pre-war and wartime experience with military aviation are to be described in Part I. The purpose is to set the stage for the post-war decisions which will come under more comprehensive analysis.

CHAPTER I

PRE-WAR BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE WITH MILITARY AIRCRAFT

Among the myriad of factors influencing congressional decision-making on military air policy in 1926 was the record of experience with aircraft in the World War. The record of America's World War aeronautical effort in 1917-1918 left its mark on both the military and civilian minds, and the impressions widely generated were compounded of rash predictions, great expectations and failure of achievement. Yet in spite of the early hopes and subsequent disillusionment with the airplane as the decisive weapon of the war, the military airplane had come into its own, and by the time of the Armistice in 1918 had shown itself to be a potent weapon of future warfare.

Universal agreement on the significance to military doctrines of World War experiences with aircraft, however, was unlikely. That there would be great differences in interpreting the facts of the war regarding the utility of aircraft in military operations was to be expected. Airmen, infantry generals, admirals and Congressmen could not be expected to agree on the "lessons" of the war, nor have the same reactions from their various war-time experiences. Therefore decisions regarding national military air policy had to be made in the midst of often unprovable theories, claims or arguments. To these ingredients were often added generous portions of sentiment and loyalty toward a particular branch of the armed services, or a particular concept of national security.

It is widely believed, erroneously or not, that, as one military writer has put it, "War is the final test of all military policies. Against its verdict no mere theory, however ardently

presented, can stand."¹ Implicit in this observation is the assumption that if victory over the enemy's military power is achieved, the validity of a particular military policy has been established. While such thinking may contain some inherent fallacies, especially when applied to the formulation of military doctrines for future wars, it is nonetheless a significant way of thought, and definitely entered into the formulation of military air policy in the post-war years.

In the period following World War I many members of Congress, as well as military leaders, were undoubtedly influenced by service loyalties either through active duty in one of the armed services or through a number of other factors inducing favoritism for one of the branches or for a set of military principles. Such factors might include, for example, the influences on "those Members who have sons-in-law in either the Army or Navy or Army posts or navy yards in their home town, or who hope to have."²

The World War aeronautical effort of the United States, and particularly congressional experience in legislating for that war-time aviation program, were undoubtedly significant background factors in post-war air policy formulation. Man's conquest of the air with a motor-propelled, heavier-than-air machine was a revolutionary technological development, with potentially great importance to national security. Yet the interpretation of this revolution in the machinery of war was to be varied, and therein lay the cause of the sometimes

1. George Fielding Eliot, "Against a Separate Air Force: The Record," Foreign Affairs, XX (October, 1941), 30.

2. Comment by John J. McSwain, in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Department of Defense and Unification of the Air Service, Hearings before Committee on Military Affairs, 69th Congress, 1st Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 363. Hereafter referred to as House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings.

bitter air power controversy which raged within and outside the armed forces in the post-war period. The Air Corps Act of 1926 saw a resolution, if only a temporary one, of some of the major issues in the post-war debate over air power. Some of the same inter- and intra-service animosities, however, continue to smoulder to this day.

In keeping with national history and tradition, the United States became involved in the European War of 1914-1918 in a posture of military unpreparedness. To offset this lack of preparation in the traditional arms and services of war, many turned to the rapid development and exploitation of military aircraft as a happy expedient for preparing the United States for a decisive participation in the war against Germany. Thus the Army's air service, which at the time of our entry into the war was still a small section of the Signal Corps, was to become the center of promises and expectations for a decisive role in the defeat of Germany. And many of those filled with great expectations for aircraft later were to suffer disappointment and disillusionment. Included among those who, possessing high hopes, later felt keen disappointment in the achievements of aircraft in the war, were undoubtedly many of the decision-makers in Congress in 1926.

The record of the pre-war and war-time development of military aircraft therefore is a significant part of the background to the decisions reached in 1926. The chapters immediately following, then, will focus attention upon the highlights of the pre-war and war-time developments in United States military aviation policy.

In 1913, a report of the House Committee on Military Affairs called for the end of a "parsimonious policy which the Government has pursued with regard to military aviation." This report went on proudly to announce, "It is expected that this committee will appropriate

\$300,000 in the pending Army bill as against \$125,000 appropriated last year for the purchase and upkeep of planes."³

Ten years after the Wright brothers' successful flight at Kitty Hawk, a congressional committee thus expressed its considered opinion that with \$300,000 the United States Army could gain a "thorough knowledge of the art" of aviation, and at the same time be able to train enough men to meet any emergency which might arise.⁴

As it turned out, the sum of \$175,000 was finally appropriated for Army aviation for fiscal year 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of the European War. The \$300,000 sum originally proposed by the committee had itself been some \$25,000 less than the amount proposed for the purchase of Army horses for the same period.⁵

In the ten-year period between the Wrights' successful experiment with their "flying machine" and the outbreak of the war, the United States had followed the national tradition of maintaining meager military forces. These were lean years for all branches of the military service, not only the infant Aviation Section of the Signal Corps.

An Aeronautical Division had been established in 1907 in the office of the Chief Signal Officer of the Army. The purpose of this division was to study the flying machine and its adaptability to military purposes.⁶

3. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs, Efficiency of the Aviation Service of the Army, House Report No. 132, to accompany H.R. 5304, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 4.

4. Idem.

5. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Estimates of Appropriations . . . for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1914, Document No. 944, 62nd Cong., 3rd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), p. 316.

6. See War Department, Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Memorandum No. 6 (August 1, 1907). Reprinted in Charles deForest Chandler and Frank P. Lahm, How Our Army Grew Wings (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1943), pp. 80-81.

As early as 1898 Congress had allotted \$50,000, with military aviation in mind, to support Professor Samuel P. Langley's ill-fated experiments with heavier-than-air machines. When the Langley apparatus crashed into the Potomac River in 1903 in its first attempted flight, the minds of many Congressmen and others were apparently convinced that this had been a waste of public money. Yet within about two months the Wrights had conducted their famous flight at Kitty Hawk. Almost four years elapsed, however, before the Wright brothers had been able to convince the War Department of the potentiality of their invention.

When Wilbur and Orville Wright were sure that their flying apparatus was practical, they made a number of attempts to interest the War Department in their invention. They conceived of their flying machine as being particularly useful for military scouting.⁷ But their attempts to negotiate with the War Department in the years 1905 and 1906 proved highly frustrating. The Army Bureau of Ordnance and Fortification showed little interest in the Wrights' invention, and it was not until European war offices were actively negotiating with the inventors, who in disgust had gone to Europe for support and recognition for their work, that the United States Government awakened to the existence of a practical, heavier-than-air machine.⁸

Early in 1908 a contract was signed for a plane, to be built by the Wrights, which, on Army specifications, was to be capable of flying 60 minutes, attaining a speed of 40 miles per hour, and carrying

7. As early as the Civil War in the United States, balloons had been used for observation. See Frederick S. Haydon, Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies, I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1941).

8. For a detailed account of the Wrights' difficulty in invoking the War Department's interest, see Fred C. Kelly, The Wright Brothers, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943), pp. 147-165.

two men.⁹ In June, 1909, a Wright plane acceptable to the Army had been delivered. This has been officially called "the world's first military airplane."¹⁰

For the next five years, however, until the stimulus of the Villa disturbances in Mexico and the war clouds over Europe, little attention was paid to the development of military aviation in the United States. Between 1898 and 1914 a total of only \$680,000 had been appropriated by Congress for military aircraft.¹¹

As late as March of 1911 there was only one active air officer in the Army, Benjamin D. Foulois, whose "air force" consisted of one battered flying machine. Foulois later reported of this period:

During the entire year 1910 the United States Government furnished me with \$150 to keep the machine going, for a whole year. I spent over \$300 out of my own pocket to keep it going. I begged, borrowed and stole material from the Quartermaster Department - bolts and nuts, wire off bales of hay, and pieces of lumber that I could find around there, in order to keep that machine going¹²

Although popular enthusiasm for aviation was spreading, it was not until increasing tensions along the Mexican border began to prompt more attention to the nation's over-all military establishment that attention was focused upon military aircraft. Up to this time, in 1914, it had been "very hard to convince anyone, either in the War Department or in civil life . . . that this [aviation] was a serious proposition."¹³

9. See Signal Corps Specification No. 486, reprinted in Chandler and Lahm, op. cit., pp. 295-298.

10. U.S. Army Air Forces, The Official Guide to the Army Air Forces, (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1944), p. 339.

11. See Edgar S. Gorrell, The Measure of America's World War Aeronautical Effort, (Northfield, Vermont: Norwich University Press, 1940), p. 3.

12. Aircraft, Hearings before the President's Aircraft Board (4 vols. bound in two, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 477. Hereafter cited as Morrow Board, Hearings.

13. Idem.

A year earlier, however, a congressional committee had become interested in aviation, and had even given serious consideration to a bill proposing separation of military aviation from the Signal Corps, and the establishment of an Army Aviation Corps.¹⁴ In light of post-war events, it is interesting to record that with only one exception all aviation officers testified in opposition to this proposal.¹⁵ Also in opposition was the Chief Signal Officer, and Captain William Mitchell, then a Signal Corps officer on the General Staff, of the Air Service. At this time it was clear that the enthusiasm of the Committee on Military Affairs for a separate Aviation Corps outran that of the military officers. Many of the same air service officers were later to be clamoring for separation not simply from the Signal Corps but from the control of the War Department.

The Military Affairs Committee in 1913 was well aware of America's very low standing in world aeronautical development. According to figures supplied to the committee by the Signal Corps,¹⁶ the United States ranked fourteenth among world nations in expenditures for aeronautics in the five year period prior to 1913. During these years even Brazil, Chile and Greece had expended more for aviation than the United States.

Yet while the committee was desirous of ending what it called the American government's "parsimonious policy" on military aviation,

14. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, H.R. 5304, 63rd Cong., 1st Sess., proposed by Representative James Hay (February 11, 1913).

15. See Arthur Sweetser, The American Air Service, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1919), p. 17, and H.H. Arnold, Global Mission, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949), pp. 42-43. The sole officer favoring the proposal was a flyer, Paul Beck. See Arnold, op. cit., p. 42.

16. House Report No. 132, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 4-6. Expenditures for aeronautics during a five-year period to 1913: (in millions of dollars), Germany, 28; France, 22; Russia, 12; Italy, 8; Austria, 5; England, 3; Belgium, 2; Japan, 1.5; (in thousands of dollars), Chile, 700; Bulgaria, 600; Greece, 600; Spain, 550; Brazil, 500; United States, 435. Ibid., p. 6.

it saw no necessity for competing with foreign nations. According to its report,

The committee has not sought to place an aviation service upon the same plane as that of the first-class war powers of Europe. . . . it would be unwise and unnecessary for this country to expend enormous sums which are being spent in other countries.¹⁷

The principle embodied in this statement in the committee's report was to be a guiding one in the formulation of peace-time military policy in the United States. America's geographical isolation placed her in a unique position regarding apparent national security needs.

The Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was first given statutory recognition in an act of Congress in 1914,¹⁸ which provided for an authorized strength of 60 officers and 260 enlisted men, special flight pay for aviators and other special considerations. The basic organization of United States Army aviation, until its later separation from the Signal Corps, dates from this act.¹⁹

Meanwhile, significant technological developments had been taking place. By 1911 aerial bombing with bombsights, although crude, and aerial firing with machine guns, had been demonstrated by Army airmen. By June of 1912 a test of the airborne use of the Lewis machine gun at College Park, Maryland, had led to "eager press queries at the War Department about the possibility of the airplane's becoming a weapon. Older officers said No; no, there was no such idea. The plane would remain a reconnaissance vehicle."²⁰ A few years later, the Chief Signal Officer could still testify before the House Military Committee

17. Ibid., p. 3.

18. 38 Stat. 514, P.L. 143, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (July 18, 1914).

19. See George E. Stratemeyer, "Administrative History of the United States Army Air Forces," Air Affairs, I (Summer, 1947), 512.

20. Arnold, op. cit., p. 38.

in December, 1914, that airplanes "are the most tremendous implement for reconnaissance and for the gathering of information that modern war has ever seen. As a fighting machine, the aeroplane has not justified its existence."²¹

Among the flyers, however, a growing resentment toward these restricted views of military leaders regarding aircraft and General Staff apathy became evident.²² What the airmen considered a narrow interpretation of aircraft utility gave rise to the idea of separatism, and this, coupled with the romance and danger attached to the aviation service, produced an accentuated esprit among flyers which was to be a significant factor in post-war developments.

The first test of American military aviation activities came in 1916 in General Pershing's attempted punitive expedition against Villa across the Mexican border. In the words of one chronicler of the period, "The entire air force of the United States broke down and disappeared in the trifling contest with the Mexican bandit, Villa, in 1916."²³ The United States "air force" in this case was the First Aero Squadron, commanded by Captain Foulois, and composed of eight obsolescing, 90-horsepower planes which proved to be no match for the mountains of Mexico.²⁴

The Army commander of the Mexican expedition later recorded in his memoirs, "In looking back to the period prior to our entry into the [world] war, the very primitive state of our aviation still

21. General George P. Scriven, quoted in Sweetser, op. cit., p. 26.

22. Stratemyer, op. cit., p. 512.

23. Theodore M. Knappen, Wings of War, (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 1.

24. See Sweetser, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

gives me a feeling of humiliation." Referring to the Mexican campaign, he observed, "In a country almost uninhabited, save for a few villages scattered here and there, where the difficulties of obtaining information were almost insurmountable, a well-trained, up-to-date fleet of airplanes would have been invaluable."²⁵

The experiences in Mexico stimulated not only new thinking on the part of the higher civilian and military personnel of the War Department, but also in congressional and other civilian circles. The initial failure of the Aviation Section in the Mexican expedition had produced a series of resolutions on the home front by organized aeronautical societies, notably the Aero Club of America and the Aeronautical Society of America.²⁶ Worsening relations with Germany, increasing publicity of the aviation activities of both the Allies and Germany, and the demands being made on American industry for its aeronautical products resulted in an unprecedented appropriation of \$13,281,666 on August 29, 1916 for the 1917 fiscal year.²⁷ This was the beginning of a giant aircraft snowball which was to roll through Congress in the following year. It was apparent that great faith in the capabilities of military aircraft was being felt rather suddenly, and this belief in the potentialities of aircraft and American productive enterprise was to produce the great aircraft expectations of 1917-1918.

In sum, the status of the nation's military aviation when the United States entered the first World War was that of a relatively small section of the Signal Corps, with a shortage of personnel and equipment for even its narrowly defined mission. Its military role was still that of reconnaissance and observation, although limited

25. John J. Pershing, My Experiences in the War, I (New York: Stokes Co., 1931), 159.

26. Harold B. Hinton, Air Victory (New York: Harper and Bros., 1948), p. 17.

27. Gorrell, op. cit., p. 3.

experiments and maneuvers in bombing, aerial machine gunning, air-ground cooperation, and air-ground radio contact had already taken place. As early as 1909 it had been suggested in the Infantry Journal that the airplane would soon render the Cavalry archaic.²⁸ This was regarded as heresy by more authoritative military thinkers for several decades after it was first propounded. Even in Europe, where military aviation before August, 1914, was far more advanced than in the United States, there was "no such thing as a combat airplane."²⁹

After initial skepticism, there had been comparatively early enthusiasm in Congress regarding the potentialities of military aircraft, as evidenced by the early attempt at statutory separation of an "Aviation Corps" from the Signal Corps. This, as has been noted, met with the opposition of the War Department as well as most of the young aviators who were later to become outspoken and active participants in the "separatist" movement.

Appropriations for military aircraft had continued to be meager until 1916, however, for a number of reasons. Notably, apathy in the War Department to this new medium of warfare was widespread and this, together with the Wilson administration's slowness to adopt a "preparedness" policy, allowed little expansion of the well-established arms, let alone the infant aviation "section" of the Signal Corps. At the same time there was relatively large-scale aviation activity in the foreign military forces. When Germany embarked upon the war in August, 1914, that nation was said to have 1,200 military airplanes; France, 300; and England, 250.³⁰

A feeling of neglect rankled the young Army airmen increasingly in the years prior to the war. Because flying those early machines

28. Major J.R.M. Taylor, "Cavalry and the Aeroplane," Infantry Journal, VI (July, 1909), 84-88.

29. Charles G. Grey, The History of Combat Airplanes, (Northfield, Vermont: Norwich University Press, 1941), p. 1.

30. Knappen, op. cit., p. 7.

seemed unusually hazardous compared with the duties of most of the other arms and services, most airmen seem to have developed a special temperament. They began to demand, and sometimes received, special privileges and treatment, thereby affecting their status with members of some of the less glamorous services. But although they received such special treatment as extra flight pay and special death benefits, the feeling of neglect was to predominate among Army flyers for years to come, and the "separatist" movement gained momentum.³¹

The punitive expedition of General Pershing into Mexico in 1916 indicated both the value and the obsolescent state of Army aviation for military operations. This was to spur action for the development of aviation in the War Department and in Congress as the Wilson administration began to "prepare" in earnest.

On the eve of America's entry into the first World War popular sentiment regarding "flying machines" had changed from that of skepticism and ridicule to great enthusiasm and expectation about the potentialities of aircraft in war. It might be said that by 1917 aircraft had captured the popular imagination. And publicity regarding air activities in general, the "air battles" of the European War, and the active participation of young American college men in what became known as the Lafayette Escadrille with the French military forces, stimulated popular faith in the future of air power.

31. There was much ado, for example, about the War Department insistence on "regulation" uniforms for flyers. The high collar was said to have been a great hazard to flyers and insistence that pilots wear spurs on their boots, even when flying, was resented. See Hiram Bingham, An Explorer in the Air Service, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), pp. 225-226.

CHAPTER II

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Referring to the state of American military aviation as the United States entered the war against Germany in 1917, General John J. Pershing commented, in retrospect, "The situation at that time as to aviation was such that every American ought to feel mortified to hear it mentioned."¹

At the beginning of the year in which America entered the war, the nation was said to rank fourteenth in governmental expenditures for aviation. From 1908 to 1916 the total number of planes delivered for use of the Army was fifty-nine. In the speed-up which followed the collapse of the Aviation Section in the Mexican Expedition of 1916 an additional eighty-three planes were obtained by the Army; and eighty-two more were delivered in the three months prior to declaration of war against Germany.

The problem of obsolescence of planes was in those days an exaggerated one. It has been estimated that approximately sixty per cent of the aircraft engaged in combat operations during the war were constantly obsolete.² Of the total of 224 planes which had been delivered to the Army from the first Wright plane to April, 1917, it is said that not one was of a serviceable type, suitable for front-line combat, when the United States entered the war.³

1. Pershing, op. cit., I, 27.

2. Gorrell, op. cit., p. 205. The problem of obsolescence, of course, continues to plague the modern air force.

3. Ibid., p. 2.

The strength of government aviation personnel in 1917 compared with that of planes. There were fifty-two officers, approximately 1,100 enlisted men, and about two hundred civilian employees in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. "Up to that time the Army had trained 139 men to fly, of whom about 26 were really qualified pilots."⁴

There was very little civilian aviation activity in the United States before 1917. There was no well-developed aircraft industry, and there were no civilian airlines with personnel and equipment as a war reservoir. Airports and landing fields were few, and whatever other aeronautical services existed were embryonic in development. Aeronautics was for the most part considered a dare-devil sport, with relatively few participants other than the handful of military aviators and a few stunt flyers. But these had received considerable publicity prior to the war, and the public conception of the stage of the nation's aeronautical development was very likely exaggerated.

The biographer of Secretary of War Newton D. Baker has recorded that in 1915 a questionnaire was sent out by the War Department to all possible manufacturers of aircraft, mostly automobile makers, and to over one hundred colleges and universities, requesting a report of their aviation interest. Only four manufacturers expressed an interest in aircraft for civil or military purposes. Twenty-five colleges reported that they had had courses in aviation. Some colleges reported lack of funds as a reason for not studying aeronautics.⁵

Thus it can be seen that the air service in 1917 had to be "created virtually from whole cloth."⁶ Aviation had received the

4. Idem.

5. Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1931), I, 281-282.

6. Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate (eds.), The Army Air Forces in World War II, Plans and Early Operations, U.S. Office of Air Force History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), I, 4.

attention of the Council of National Defense, organized late in 1916, through its Advisory Commission of industrial experts. A National Aeronautics Committee was designated and assigned with the task of bringing the government and manufacturers together. Dr. Charles D. Walcott, aeronautics committee chairman, told a joint meeting of Army and Navy officers and manufacturers on March 22, 1917, on the eve of the war, that in aviation America had "hardly made a beginning. . . . No amount of money will buy time," he said. "Even the most generous preparations would not open up the years we have passed and enable us to lay carefully the foundations of a great industry and a great aero army through the education of engineers, manufacturers, teachers, and all the wide variety of personnel required."⁷

In the Army itself there was "only a trifling nucleus of skill" pertaining to technical aircraft problems.⁸ The official files were almost void of vital information regarding technical aircraft data.

There was . . . little or no engineering talent competent to design fully equipped military aircraft which could compete with Europe. . . . Sketchy and incomplete as was our knowledge of airplane construction, it was no more hazy than our notion of how many planes to build. What would constitute overwhelming superiority in the air?⁹

The answers to such questions were to come from Europe, where the pressures of war or threat of war had, in a different environment, produced different national security concepts. This had resulted in a considerable advance in the science of military aeronautics. Meanwhile, America's means of acquiring Europe's knowledge included the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, established in 1915

7. Quoted in Sweetser, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

8. Benedict Crowell and Arthur Wilson, The Armies of Industry, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), I, 326.

9. Ibid., pp. 326-327.

"to supervise and direct the scientific study of the problems of flight . . . and to discuss their solution and their application to practical questions."¹⁰ The secrecy of war operations, however, had shielded most of this information from American authorities and therefore contributed to the serious vacuum of technical knowledge and data. As General "Hap" Arnold later wrote in his memoirs, "We had no theories of aerial combat . . ." to even set the pace for our industrial designers and engineers.¹¹

Whatever "mortification" was felt at the realization of these facts was soon to give way to an almost unbelievable burst of enthusiasm in aviation circles, in Congress, and in the press for military aircraft. The "aeroplane" suddenly seemed to be the magical new weapon with which America would make the decisive contribution to the defeat of Germany. Such hopes, it was to be seen, ran far too high, and this undue faith in aircraft was to contribute to an early disillusionment in many quarters. These factors could not fail to affect the post-war development of the air service.

Public clamor for building up the "aeroplane service" increased as the nation's total unpreparedness became frighteningly clear and as strained relations with Germany approached the breaking point. As early as April, 1916, the New York Times editorially had complained of the situation.

The attitude of our Government, including the War and Navy Departments, toward the aeroplane service has been radically wrong from the beginning. We have too few flying machines and too few trained men. . . . Yet since August, 1914, the absolute need of aeroplanes of high power in war has been proved every day.¹²

10. 38 Stat. 930, Naval Appropriations Act of March 3, 1915.

11. Arnold, op. cit., p. 52.

12. April 4, 1916, p. 12. See also New York Times, editorial of May 16, 1916, p. 12.

Another example of what was being publicly advocated can be cited from a lecture of Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary before the annual meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science on April 29, 1916. Although thinking largely in terms of American coastal defense, Admiral Peary said:

The sooner we wake up to the fact that command of the air is absolutely vital to our safety and that it can be secured more quickly and at less cost than any other form of defense, the better it will be for us. . . . The aeroplane has completely changed modern warfare. . . . Our geographical position, our national rank and standing, our national safety demand it. Our resources and mechanical genius not only permit it but make it easily possible.¹³

It is clear that public faith in both the combat effectiveness of aircraft and the potentialities of "our resources and mechanical genius" was very strong as the nation entered into the war against Germany. And this faith, shared, it seems, by European war leaders, was soon to have its influence upon the Congress, which after the declaration of war was, in the tradition of our Congresses in war-time, to loosen freely the public purse strings at almost any suggestion from the military leaders.

The rising flame of enthusiasm for building up the "Aviation Corps" as the answer to our national defense needs had, for example, spread to the city of Ripon, Wisconsin. The city had instructed its representative in Congress that it was willing to give up a \$75,000 authorization for a new Post Office building if that money could be re-designated for the development and equipment of the Aviation

13. U.S. Senate, Command of the Air, printed as Senate Document No. 687, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), pp. 6-10.

Corps.¹⁴ Presented in the form of a House bill (H.R. 17020, 64th Congress, 2nd Session), and probably motivated and inspired by the publicity value to the city as well as those favoring an aircraft build-up, the matter was debated on the floor of the House of Representatives.¹⁵ Said Representative Mann,

There was considerable agitation of the [aviation] subject in the country, and the patriotic people of Ripon, Wis., who knew that they did not need a public building there and who believed that the country did need an extension of the Aviation Service, gave to the press a good advertisement, one of the best that has ever gone along the wires. . . . Well, it had good effect. One of the great effects of that bill was that the Senate agreed to an amendment increasing the appropriation for the Aviation Service by over ten millions. That ought to satisfy Ripon. (Laughter) The little paltry \$75,000 . . . was nothing compared to the \$10,000,000 which was added by the Senate, and which we agreed to, making an appropriation of \$13,000,000, where it had originally been proposed at half a million dollars - a reasonable increase of 2,600 per cent.¹⁶

Ripon's gesture was, in fact, defeated in the House, but its effect on public and congressional sentiment may have been consequential.

The nation's lack of preparedness in the field of aviation was of course not unique. But the traditional and well-established principle of relying upon a citizen army in a war emergency contained some inherent complications in a highly technical and specialized field

14. The terms "Aviation Section," "Aeronautical Division," "Airplane Division," "Air Service Division" and "Aviation Corps" were used interchangeably in this pre-war period. According to General H.H. Arnold, this was "typical of the confusion." All references were to the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps until May, 1918, when it was removed from the Signal Corps and became a separate Air Service, as part of the Army. See Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

15. Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess. LIV, 506-508.

16. Ibid., p. 509.

such as aviation.¹⁷ The Signal Corps was merely one of many services of the Army, and the Aviation Section, in 1917, was merely one of the many sections of the Signal Corps. And when, in line with the principles of the Constitution and the traditions of the Founding Fathers, the size of the regular military establishment was kept to a minimum, it was unlikely that aviation would be found in a well-developed stage of war preparedness in 1917. The Army itself, as the nation entered the war, had in its regular structure a strength of 5,791 officers and 121,797 enlisted men.¹⁸

Small as was the regular Army, one could not say of the personnel and equipment of the Infantry, Cavalry, or Corps of Engineers in their spheres of operations, what could be said of the Aviation Section: namely, that "There was in April, 1917 not one airplane suitable for use against the enemy."¹⁹ In the words of Benedict Crowell, who played an important role in the management of war production,

Here in America mechanical flight had been born; but we had lived to see other nations develop the invention into an industry and a science that were a closed book to our people. . . . Such military study of the progress as we had conducted was casual. It had, in fact, brought America scarcely a single basic fact on which we could build our contemplated industry. 20

While these personal accounts suggesting that we had, in April of 1917, "not one airplane," nor "scarcely a single basic fact," are exaggerations,²¹ it seems clear that as the United States assumed a belligerent status in the war the nation was indeed groping for an

17. For a detailed account of legislation, administration and opinion regarding the over-all military establishment, 1915-1920, see John Dickenson, The Building of an Army, (New York: The Century Co., 1922).

18. War Department, Annual Report 1917, "Report of the Adjutant General," I, 171.

19. Stratemyer, op. cit., p. 512.

20. Crowell and Wilson, op. cit., I, 325.

21. Pershing reported that a National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics survey in 1917 showed that of the 55 training planes on hand, 51 were obsolete and four obsolescent. See his Experiences, I, 27-28.

aircraft program and a direction for its efforts.

The nucleus of America's World War I aircraft program came from France, in the form of a cable from the French Premier Ribot. The now famous Ribot Cable set forth an ambitious target of aircraft production, calling for 4,500 planes, 5,000 pilots, and 50,000 trained mechanics to be sent to France for the spring of 1918.²² This program, which Colonel "Billy" Mitchell was said to have influenced the French authorities to send to the White House,²³ arrived in Washington just forty-eight days after President Wilson's war message to Congress. With it the War Department had "a virtual bomb dropped in its own lap."²⁴ The Ribot plan was approved by the Joint Army and Navy Technical Board, and the Secretaries of War and the Navy. The Aviation Section was instructed to prepare a detailed plan to submit to Congress. The small Aviation Section in the War Department had been advised by France on May 1, 1918 that Germany had attained superiority of the air in the battle zones.²⁵

The ground forces themselves realized that it would be a year at least before their part of the American war effort could really be felt in France. . . . but until the Ribot cablegram came in May, our Army superiors were not especially interested in the airplane as a shooting weapon.²⁶

The perfection, by the German aircraft expert Anthony Fokker, of machine guns synchronized to shoot through propellers in 1916 caused increased interest among some military leaders in the airplane as a combat weapon with missions other than observation and reconnaissance.

22. Cable quoted in Sweetser, op. cit., p. 66.

23. See Arnold, op. cit., pp. 50-51; Isaac Don Levine, Mitchell: Pioneer of Air Power, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), p. 99.

24. Arnold, op. cit., p. 50.

25. Ibid., p. 51.

26. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

The realization that this device, and a formidable supply of planes, were a part of Germany's military power spurred on America's aircraft plans. Formation flying, also developed by the Germans, was soon to be introduced on the Western front to increase Germany's established aeronautical superiority. Yet to most War Department planners the airplane remained a novel and untried device.

To coordinate the American aircraft program with that of the Allies, and to gain much-needed technical information, the "Bolling Mission," headed by an Air Reserve Officer, Colonel R.C. Bolling, was appointed. The mission arrived in England on June 26 to confer with General Pershing and his staff and to make a quick study in England, France and Italy of methods of training, production and combat organization. Soon the required basic aircraft data were to be flowing back to the United States.

Before receipt of the Ribot proposal, the Aviation Section had already worked out a far less ambitious program, which it had submitted to the Secretary of War a few days prior to America's declaration of war. This plan, calling for an appropriation of \$54,000,000 for an aviation service of 1,851 aviators and 300 balloonists and the necessary equipment, would have provided sixteen reconnaissance squadrons and sixteen balloon companies. It was a program "based solely on air reconnaissance units for the number of infantry and cavalry divisions the Army contemplated using, and still visualized no bombing of fighting planes." Even this program, which now seems modest, had caused "enough raised eyebrows among . . . superiors in the Signal Corps,"²⁷ and Congress had finally reduced the appropriation, probably on the advice of the War Department, to \$43,450,000 in an emergency appropriation act of June 15, 1917.

27. Ibid., p. 53.

When the Aviation Section staff completed work on the Ribot proposal, a program had been drawn up which "almost staggered us," wrote General Arnold.²⁸ In approving the Ribot program, the Joint Army and Navy Technical Board had decided that the program as suggested would, in fact, call for the production of 12,625 service planes, 24,250 service engines, plus 10,000 training planes and 21,000 training engines. The total was 22,625 airplanes and 45,250 engines, with no exact date set for the attainment of the program.²⁹ These were the goals confronting the Aviation Section staff, in addition to trainees and other equipment. A bill was submitted through regular channels for \$707,541,000 covering procurement, construction and maintenance. This was pared down by Army superiors, but finally, "no matter how it was sliced, it came out as a necessary \$639,241,452."³⁰ The figure later to be presented to Congress was to be a flat \$640,000,000.³¹ Never before in its history had the Congress been asked to contribute such a large sum for a single purpose. Before the war scarcely a total of \$16,000,000 had been appropriated in the years since the initial grants in 1898 for Professor Langley's aerial experiments. The Aviation Section's plan was under the guidance of Major B.D. Foulois, who later told an aircraft board that this was his third revision of a plan to carry out the Ribot requests. It had finally been approved by a subcommittee of the War College Division of the General Staff.³² The plan was then submitted to the War College Division of the General Staff which, in secret session (according to Foulois), disapproved the entire program.

28. Idem.

29. Correll, op. cit., p. 1.

30. Arnold, op. cit., p. 54.

31. Section 10, P.L. No. 29, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 24, 1918).

32. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 478.

Opposition had been expected from the General Staff. Members of this policy-controlling group seemed to regard aviation at that time as a relatively minor part of the military establishment - it remained still a section in the Signal Corps. An early historian of the air service wrote as follows:

It was fully realized that the military authorities . . . would not appreciate a programme which virtually erected the Air Service into a third arm not imcomparable with the Army and Navy themselves. . . . At that time nearly all line officers felt that the Service was wholly unjustified in its claims by any experience abroad.³³

Aviation was, of course, only one of a great many complicated problems confronting the General Staff. The Assistant Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Joseph E. Kuhn, expressed real alarm lest this ambitious plan for aviation dislocate what he considered to be more vital production needs for the war. Being re-assured in this respect, he gave his approval to the industrial part of the program.³⁴ But the General Staff failed to clear the program for presentation to Congress, and aviation enthusiasts were beginning to show impatience with the delay. Notable and important among these was the Chief Signal Officer, General George O. Squier. Not having received General Staff approval by July 4, 1917, General Squier, in an unusual step, went directly to the Secretary of War, urging his permission to submit the bill to Congress. With Secretary Baker's support, Squier, in an unprecedented step, sent the bill to Congress without formal action on it by the General Staff.³⁵ Foulois later indicated that Congress had itself called for the plan. This independent action, later criticized by some members of Congress, was just an early round in the fight between

33. Sweetser, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

34. Ibid., p. 69.

35. Ibid., pp. 69-70. See also Arnold, op. cit., p. 54.

the aviators and the General Staff. Within a year the overly ambitious program was recognized as impossible of attainment, and the partial failure in its fulfillment may have further strengthened the hand of the General Staff on the issue of an independent air force in the post-war years.

Even had Congress wished to reject the proposal, which seems unlikely, or to debate extensively this largest single appropriation ever requested for a single purpose, which seems possible, it was not permitted to do so. To the consternation of at least a few Congressmen the bill had completely by-passed the House Committee on Appropriations, and had been sent by the House leadership directly to the Military Affairs Committee. Hearings on the bill were cursory. Only two meetings were held with officials of the War Department.³⁶

General Squier forcefully presented the argument for speedy passage of the bill. Squier testified:

It is my opinion, that the Premier of France is fully cognizant of the military needs of this country, and would not make such an important request unless he believed it of absolute military importance to the cause of the Allies . . . I do not believe that any official, military or civil . . . is in a position to say that such assistance should be withheld, unless this country intends to act in a perfunctory manner in its cooperation with its Allies in war.³⁷

Promoters of the bill, in order to ease the shock and evade the House Appropriations Committee, had initially withheld from the Congress their estimate of the huge cost of the program. Witnesses of various foreign military missions were paraded before the House committee in the second day of hearings, and they added their impressive first-hand accounts of the value of aircraft in military

36. Foulois later indicated that Congress had itself called for the plan. See his testimony in the Morrow Board Hearings, p. 479.

37. Quoted in Sweetser, op. cit., p. 71.

operations. In a week's time the bill was unanimously reported to the House with one significant amendment, a section appropriating \$640,000,000 for carrying out the provisions of the act. This was on July 13.

Meanwhile, a plan, cleverly designed and seemingly successful in its execution, for the engineering of public consent and enthusiastic support for the aircraft production program was initiated. Howard E. Coffin, automotive manufacturer, who was chairman of the Aircraft Production Board which had been established on May 16, 1917 by the Council of National Defense to coordinate Army and Navy aircraft production, was in charge of this scheme to exert potent if indirect pressures on Congress. The purpose was, in short, to assure the passage of the \$640,000,000 appropriation, and to have this done without the usual congressional delay.

Coffin planned a confidential luncheon, held in New York City in June and attended by about twenty "of the most powerful editors in the United States."³⁸ He told the group quite frankly of his aim - that of influencing public, and thus congressional, opinion in support of the aircraft program. Said Coffin to the assembled editors: ". . . it will lie within the power of the comparatively small group of men here in this room to do more towards the passage of this bill . . . than can be accomplished by any other agency in the country."³⁹ His hope, according to Sweetser, "was not so much to secure immediate publicity as to lay a groundwork in the minds of the men there present that would be receptive for the announcements shortly to come from Washington."⁴⁰ Coffin promised an early announcement of a series of sensational news stories from Washington.

38. Sweetser, op. cit., p. 76.

39. Idem.

40. Idem.

The arguments presented to this select group were telling ones. The editors were assured by the leading civilian aircraft experts in Washington that the aircraft program to be proposed promised to very greatly shorten the war. Supremacy of the air on the part of the Allies would save hundreds of thousands of lives which might otherwise be spent in trench warfare. "The road to Berlin lies through the air," Coffin told the assembled newsmen.⁴¹ "The eagle must end this war." E.A. Deeds, R.C. Bolling, and members of the Allied military missions offered the same promise to the editors, which was, in effect, that military aircraft could win the war. Two days later the New York Times was found faithfully proclaiming editorially: "By no other means can we so quickly or so surely render valuable aid to our allies. . . . Airplanes can be rapidly built. . . . Money is all that is lacking."⁴²

The meeting had its effect in other sectors of the press. Editorials began to appear in all sections of the nation, urging a giant air fleet and immediate enactment by Congress of legislation to provide the thousands of aircraft by which, it was stated or implied, the Allies could conquer the German enemy in the air and on the ground.

Coffin followed through by arranging for periodic releases from Washington officials, which were prominently displayed in the news columns of a cooperative press and were often accompanied by exhortative editorials.⁴³

On June 16 the Chief Signal Officer, General Squier, issued a release which urged public support for

. . . building an army in the air . . . brigades of winged cavalry mounted on gas-driven flying horses

41. Ibid., p. 77. Sweetser's study is based on official sources.

42. June 10, 1917, Section II, p. 2.

43. The New York Times, for example, in the period from June 5 to July 23, 1917 carried 15 separate editorials favorable to the aircraft program with such titles as "First of All Airplanes," "Aviation Plans Must Not Be Delayed," and "At Last the Airplanes."

Sweep the Germans from the sky, blind the Prussian cannon, and the time will be ripe to release an enormous number of flying fighters to raid and destroy military camps, ammunition depots, military establishments of all kinds. ⁴⁴

Two days later Secretary of War Baker publicly noted that "The War Department is behind the aircraft plans with every ounce of energy and enthusiasm at its command." And on June 23 President Wilson's letter to Secretary Baker was made public, in which the President declared he was "entirely willing to back up such a program . . ." of aircraft production. ⁴⁵

In this concerted effort it can be seen that the freedom of action of the Congress was being constantly narrowed. But debate in Congress on the bill was to show that the enthusiastic claims, as wild as some of them were, were having their effect upon Congressmen themselves. It soon became apparent that no congressional opposition of significance was to develop to the request for unprecedented millions for the "brigades of winged cavalry" which would swarm over and destroy the German war machine.

44. Quoted in Sweetser, op. cit., p. 79.

45. Idem.

CHAPTER III

DEBATE ON THE \$640,000,000 AIRCRAFT BILL
AND SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATIONS

In the congressional debate that began in the House of Representatives on the \$640 million aviation bill on July 14, hardly a voice was heard questioning the implication that with a fleet of airplanes the war could be speedily and cleanly won. There were a few objections to the request for immediate action without debate; objections to the indefinite provisions of the bill; questions as to whether it had the approval of the General Staff; and some discussion criticizing such a hasty procedure in handling public funds. The Republican minority leader in the House observed that Congress was buying a "pig in a poke,"¹ but he was willing to take the chance. Amidst loud applause and cries of "Vote!" "Vote!" Representative Mann said, "If I had my way about it, I would pass this bill without saying a word."² This signal from the Republican leader in the House meant certain and probably unanimous passage of the bill, but there were those in both parties who by nature or by constitution could not let this happen without saying a word.

Representative S. Hubert Dent, Jr., sponsor and floor manager of the bill, explained briefly its provisions. He described it as calling for a "temporary increase of the Signal Corps" leaving much of the discretion as to organization to the President. He pleaded for secrecy in details because this was something, he said, "the enemy ought not to know."³ Dent's unanimous consent request for closure of all debate was refused.

1. Representative James R. Mann, Congressional Record, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., LV, 5109.

2. Idem.

3. Ibid., p. 5106.

Had the bill the approval of the General Staff or the War College? demanded Representative Clarence B. Miller of Minnesota. Dent said he believed both had approved, but Miller contradicted this assertion by saying that upon inquiry he had found that the matter was still under consideration, and while the General Staff and War College did not go on record as disapproving the bill, neither were they ready to offer approval.⁴

Representative Julius Kahn, arguing for secrecy, stated amidst the applause of his colleagues that "It is as essential today for a nation to have control of the air as it is essential to have control of the sea."⁵ Kahn said, "I am asking the House to have confidence in its Committee on Military Affairs, to have confidence in General Squier, and to have confidence in the War Department."

Representative Mann, confessing that he had little knowledge of what military aircraft might do, declared:

I can see no way for the allied army breaking through the German Army on the west front under any existing standards of warfare. But here is an unknown quantity - the use of flying machines. No one knows what can be accomplished by it. No one knows its limitations. No one knows its possibilities . . . I believe that the time has arrived with our country when we can afford to spend an immense sum of money in trying out the control of the air (applause) and see, first, whether that will give us control of the battle front; second, whether it will strike demoralization and produce revolution in Germany itself. (Applause)⁶

Coming from a leader of the House opposition party, Mann's loudly applauded statement enabled Dent to secure an hour and a half limitation on further debate. This gave time for the setting forth of

4. Idem.

5. Ibid., p. 5107.

6. Ibid., p.. 5109.

other objections, none of them questioning the extravagant claims being made for the potentialities of aircraft, but rather doubting the wisdom of such hasty handling of the bill.

The House Appropriations Committee chairman, John J. Fitzgerald, whose committee had been by-passed in an irregular fashion, took the floor for a lengthy discussion of congressional appropriations procedure.

I appreciate as much as any other member the importance and the necessity of speedy action in connection with aviation, but if Congress is to follow the practice adopted in the enactment of this bill . . . then the Congress is about to abdicate its functions and to turn over indiscriminately for expenditure vast sums for purposes that Congress would not approve if it had knowledge of them. ⁷

Fitzgerald, stung a little because his committee had been deliberately avoided on this measure, then made a plea for the return to the system of concentrating all authority for appropriations in one committee, a measure that was to be adopted after the war. He criticized the present "old, slipshod, illogical, indefensible method of handling public funds."⁸ He then described in detail the confused maze in which Congress had recently handled appropriations for aviation activities, with some of the funds for the Army and Navy aviation being handled by the Committees on Military and Naval Affairs and other grants being made by the House Committee on Appropriation, all with little or no coordination.

Instead of developing in this house, as we should do, a group of men devoting themselves exclusively to questions of public expenditures, we distribute the power among eight different committees, which can not be familiar with the statutes and the provisions and the regulations that affect

7. Idem.

8. Ibid., p. 5111.

the expenditure of public money, cannot have that comprehensive grasp of the public service required, do not keep divorced from too friendly an interest in particular branches of the public service, and are frequently tortured with petty jealousies and controversies that are detrimental to effective service.⁹

Representative Miller then noted that "The applause during the debate which has been had, which greeted the statement approving the program, indicates a practical unanimity in thought and feeling upon the part of the membership of the House in respect to the aims and objects of the bill." But he was still troubled by the lack of approval of the plan by the General Staff, and felt that aviation was a new field in which our preparation was inadequate. Congress ought to know whether the bill had been subjected to the acid test, which to him meant General Staff approval.¹⁰

"Rubber stamp" was the cry of Representative Irvine L. Lenroot, who expressed amazement at the proposal of Mann that the bill should be adopted without debate. No wonder, Lenroot declared, the House of Representatives is "losing the respect of the country"¹¹ The War Department was censured by Representative Frederick H. Gillett, a Republican, because it had "in defiance of the law, sent in no estimate, but privately asked the Military Affairs Committee for it [the appropriation]."¹² Gillett was also a little skeptical of the secrecy surrounding the details of the measure. Secrecy was exaggerated, he thought, possibly "to excuse the usurpation of the Military Committee." But like most others, he was willing to waive his objections because of his belief that aircraft development offered the best chance for speedy success in the war. Representative Horace M. Towner of Iowa agreed that "no other single act can do so much toward winning a speedy

9. Idem. Fitzgerald's proposal at this time was to be enacted by a post-war Congress in conjunction with new executive budget procedures.

10. Ibid., p. 5120.

11. Ibid., p. 5121.

12. Ibid., pp. 5120-5121.

victory."¹³ This great amount of money should be speedily appropriated, added Representative Percy E. Quin, "in order to win this war." He also said:

One aeroplane is worth, according to the testimony, at least one regiment of cavalry. . . . It is worth as much as 12,500 to 15,000 cavalymen or private soldiers. . . . Before this war is over I believe we will have them [aircraft] that will carry as much as several tons of explosives in their magazines and so destroy the enemy. ¹⁴

One lone voice in the House attempted to dampen the hopes being generously proclaimed that American aircraft, to be sent to France probably in the next spring, would quickly end the war. This came from a New York Representative who was to join soon the Army air service. Said Fiorello LaGuardia,

I do not agree . . . that aeronautics is still in the experimental stage and that we are taking a chance. We have long passed that time. The use of airplanes has been established, and they are now . . . the most useful branch of the Army. . . . I do not agree either with what has been said about this war being won with the airplanes we provide for today. This war will be won in a much more cruel and less spectacular manner. ¹⁵

The time agreed upon for debate having run out, the House passed the bill on the day it had been received from committee. Though not a roll-call vote, the record by unanimous consent was instructed to show that no member voted against the bill. ¹⁶

13. Ibid., p. 5121.

14. Ibid., pp. 5130-5131.

15. Ibid., p. 5133. LaGuardia, who was later to be a champion of the development of military aircraft, expressed a belief at this time that control of the exportation of food would have a much more telling effect upon the enemy. But his questioning of the magic of aircraft that day was not widely heralded. He later noted in his memoirs that there were some in Congress who had no faith in the military utility of aircraft, while others, in 1917, regarded it as "a miracle weapon that would win the war. I argued against both attitudes." See Fiorello LaGuardia, The Making of An Insurgent, (New York: Lippincott, 1948), pp. 159-160.

16. Congressional Record, LV, 5143.

The bill was sent to the Senate, and by July 18 its Military Affairs Committee had reported it. Senator George E. Chamberlain, in presenting the bill for Senate action, explained that the committee had discussed it and "felt that while there was much in the measure that might just as well have been left out, yet in view of the urgency of the situation, concluded to report it to the Senate without any amendment whatsoever."¹⁷ Rumors had arisen that the bill might be held up in the Senate¹⁸ in spite of the solidarity which had been shown in the House and the clamor in the press for immediate action. Howard Coffin's experiments in the youthful field of public relations were apparently successful. In the face of public pressure, which was articulated in newspaper columns and editorials, senatorial choice of action was narrowly limited.

On the day before the Senate took up the bill for floor amendment the Washington Post came forth with high praise for the House's "example of patriotism," in passing the bill with record-breaking speed. By implication, any delay on the part of the Senate would be unpatriotic, since "no useful purpose can be served by talk" in the Senate.¹⁹ "A fleet [of aircraft] three months from now may bring the war to a successful end," concluded the editorial.

The major question raised in the Senate which threatened to delay action on the bill was a provision for the drafting of men into the air service. But even those Senators who questioned this aspect of the bill prefaced their remarks by noting their intention not to delay action and their faith in what aircraft would do in the war.

17. Ibid., p. 5209.

18. Sweetser, op. cit., p. 88.

19. Editorial, Washington Post (July 18, 1917). Reprinted in Congressional Record, LV, 5253.

Senator James K. Vardaman did express his feeling that "the amount carried is ridiculously large. . . . Of course, if these airships are needed, we have got to have them, but it looks like a pretty heavy burden." But, he concluded, this was no excuse for wasting time in debate.²⁰

Senator Robert L. Owen was concerned about what he thought would be an uncontrolled expenditure of public funds as a result of the bill. He later proposed an amendment which would safeguard contracts from "departmental or indirect graft of any kind."²¹ But the Senate forthwith rejected his amendment.²² By some, Owen's attempted amendment was considered an unwarranted and unpatriotic dilatory tactic. The New York Times leveled editorial guns against Senator Owen, and accused him of opposition to the bill. On July 20 Owen denied any such opposition in a Senate statement, declaring his intention only of protecting public funds and noting, defensively, that he had "voted to speed all the war measures." Owen bitterly chastised the New York Times editor for what he termed "false representations" of Owen's seven-minute speech on the Senate floor the previous day advocating a special committee to safeguard war contracts against fraud. The editorial of July 20 had the effect, Owen complained, of "charging me with being a public enemy."²³

While much of the press apparently would not countenance any move in the Senate which seemed dilatory on the aircraft bill, some Senators did express resentment at what they considered to be a steam-roller process of getting the measure approved. Said Senator Thomas W. Hardwick,

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- 20. Congressional Record, LV, 5210.
 - 21. Ibid., p. 5211.
 - 22. Ibid., p. 5370.
 - 23. Ibid., p. 5334.

I am not excited about this matter. I know that some of these newspapers and some of the people who sympathize with them, are excited. I endeavor to make all reasonable allowance for that frame or state of mind. I am perfectly willing that the Senate shall vote whenever it pleases . . . but whenever it does I expect to exercise my constitutional rights as a member of this body, no matter who shall be displeased. ²⁴

The bill was quickly passed in the Senate on July 21, after an amendment proposed by Senator Hardwick to eliminate the draft feature of the bill had been decisively rejected. Senator Owen's proposal for an aircraft contract supervising committee was also rejected. Thus the bill, in its House form, had congressional enactment on July 21, without roll-call and without any finally recorded objections. ²⁵

President Wilson signed the measure ²⁶ on July 24, fifteen weeks after the declaration of war. Thus was launched the ambitious program of aircraft production for which the nation was little prepared, but for which great expectations had been generated. It is quite clear that policy and program were not, in fact, shaped in any way by Congress. Nor, in its major outlines, was the program formulated by the General Staff of the Army. By the former it was accepted with little discussion or debate. What comments were made on the floor of the House and Senate were made apologetically or in a defensive manner, for the most part. Writing of this huge appropriation many years later, General H.H. Arnold commented sarcastically, "As far as I know, it has never, up to the date of this writing, had the approval of the General Staff of the Army." ²⁷

24. Ibid., p. 5254.

25. Ibid., pp. 5369-5372.

26. P. L. No. 29, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 24, 1917).

27. Arnold, op. cit., p. 54.

The measure grew out of the proposal of the French Premier Ribot, which Colonel "Billy" Mitchell apparently had an important hand in drafting. "I decided," wrote Mitchell in his diary early in May, 1917, "it will be a good thing to get the French Government to exert pressure on ours."²⁸ There followed the cablegram from Ribot, out of which plans were made in the Signal Corps Aviation Section for the \$640,000,000 bill passed by Congress. Public and congressional support for the measure were engineered by Howard Coffin and his Aircraft Production Board associates with the enthusiastic and widespread cooperation of the press. Illustrative of the faith being generated in the capabilities of military aircraft was the banner headline of the New York Herald on June 18, 1917, which proclaimed "GREATEST OF AERIAL FLEETS TO CRUSH THE TEUTONS."

But newspaper editorials and headlines could not provide the training schools; train the would-be flyers who had been attracted by the thousands as a result of the publicity; fell the spruce and provide dope and castor oil and many other raw materials for the great air fleet, and produce the planes promised by the enthusiastic press. The greatest need was time, which congressional appropriations could not buy and which was to weigh on the patience of those who had been led to expect early and significant results. Howard Coffin, perhaps alarmed a little by the magnitude of the expectations he had helped to create, had advised: "It is just possible we cannot get full equipment of airplanes within the [promised] time, but we shall have enough to get a part of the men in the air, and we shall not be seriously handicapped the first few weeks if we do not have a full quota."²⁹

28. Quoted in ibid., p. 50; see also Levine, op. cit., pp. 97-100.

29. Quoted in Palmer, op. cit., I, 294.

Failure to live up to expectations was more than "just possible." America possessed unrefined raw materials in abundance as well as an ample supply of manpower, generally untrained for the many phases of aeronautics, but only about a dozen companies capable of filling in a meager way government aircraft contracts.³⁰ An attempt to build up almost overnight an aircraft industry and a well-trained air service was bound to encounter many difficulties and set-backs. For the remainder of 1917 and well into 1918 there continued to be a series of obstacles in the administration of the ambitious aircraft program. Sudden preparations for warfare were bound to produce an over-all confusion of effort, but the infant aircraft was beset with added difficulties inherent in its newness. An Aircraft Board was established by Congress on October 1, 1917³¹ to replace the Aircraft Production Board which had been attempting to function without real authority. No attempt will be made here to detail America's World War aeronautical production effort.³²

Mounting impatience with the lagging aircraft program was apparent in the winter and spring of 1917-18. A great German offensive had been launched in early spring of 1918 and the hoped-for fleets of American aircraft were nowhere in sight. Realization grew widespread that the ambitious program was failing.³³ It was not until May, 1918, that the first American-made plane was airborne in France, and not until August that the first American-built aircraft flew "across the front-line trenches."³⁴

30. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 7.

31. P. L. No. 48, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. U.S. Statutes at Large, XL, 296-297.

32. See Crowell and Wilson, op. cit., Vol. I; Sweetser, op. cit., Gorrell, op. cit.; Isaac F. Marcossou, Colonel Deeds, (New York: Dodd-Mead, 1947); Knappen, op. cit.; and Arnold, op. cit., pp. 65-79.

33. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 9.

34. Gorrell, op. cit., p. 4.

When the program's failure to achieve its goals had become obvious, criticism of the administration increased. There were rumors and accusations of incompetence, graft, and sabotage by pro-Germans. "The Air Service, running true to form," wrote Chief of Staff General March, "was the storm center of all the attacks on the War Department's war activities."³⁵

Even though the air service and the aircraft production program may have been the "storm center" of attacks on the War Department, it should be noted here that these were merely major skirmishes in the larger battle going on since the start of the war between President Wilson and certain congressional leaders, particularly in the Senate. The issue was that of over-all administration of the war effort. An early attempt by Senator John W. Weeks, Massachusetts Republican and later Secretary of War, to establish a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, reminiscent of the situation surrounding Lincoln's war administration, had been defeated. But it had passed the Senate, and was later eliminated in conference between the House and Senate on the Food Bill.³⁶ As dissatisfaction grew with the war accomplishments of the Wilson administration, Senator George Chamberlain, Military Affairs chairman, and a member of Wilson's party, introduced a bill proposing the setting up of a War Cabinet which would have in effect stripped Wilson of his powers. In a skillful counter-move Wilson was successful in having the Congress pass the Overman Act³⁷ which gave him wide war powers, and effectively squelched any serious congressional interference with his administration

35. Peyton C. March, The Nation at War, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1932), p. 199.

36. See C.B. Swisher, "The Control of War Preparations in the United States," American Political Science Review, XXXIV (December, 1940), 1091-1092.

37. 40 Stat. 556, May 20, 1918.

during the war.³⁸ These events are cited to indicate the over-all friction between the legislative and executive branches, which increased with public disappointment over the paucity of early war accomplishments. The aircraft program was one of the most glaring failures at the time, principally because highly advertised goals had been, in reality, beyond accomplishment from the first..

Much of the acrimonious criticism, disillusionment, and partisan congressional investigation of 1918, 1919, and 1920, surrounding the nation's aircraft record during the war was the harvest reaped by those who had sown seeds of false hope in 1917. Anxiety over the possible success of enemy operations in France in the spring of 1918 "pitched in a high key the stern chorus of inquiry from the Congress, the press and the people." Where were the planes that should have been "driving the German planes to earth and bombing the Germans out of their trenches? All doubt as to what would be the subject of our great war scandal had been set at rest: it was aviation."³⁹

Who was to blame for the fact that the Western front was not swarming with American-built planes? What happened to the \$640,000,000? Had there been graft and corruption? All of these questions, and others, made the air service "the stormy petrel of the Army," in the words of the Chief of Staff.⁴⁰ These controversies, the congressional tempers aroused, and the intra-service feuds engendered, all were bound to affect the post-war development of military air policy. The alleged failure of the aircraft production program offered fertile ground

38. See F. L. Paxson, America at War, 1917-1918, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939), pp. 200 ff; James M. Leake, "The Conflict over Coordination," American Political Science Review, XII (August, 1918), 365-380; and Louis Smith, American Democracy and Military Power, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 207-211.

39. Palmer, op. cit., II, 173.

40. March, op. cit., p. 198.

for partisan criticism of the Democratic administration's war-time leadership.

Details of the congressional, Presidential and public reactions to these charges, counter-charges, rumors and investigations constitute an area for separate study. In outline, there were several significant investigations: a seemingly spurious one by the famed and flamboyant sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, undertaken initially with President Wilson's help;⁴¹ an investigation by the Senate Military Affairs Committee; and, the most comprehensive and judicious of the three, a Department of Justice investigation headed by Charles Evans Hughes.

The aircraft charges burst around the allegations of Gutzon Borglum who, in March, 1918, pointed to all kinds of inefficiency, mismanagement and even criminality. Borglum centered his attention on Colonel E.A. Deeds, head of the Equipment Division of the Signal Corps and charged with the responsibility of plane and engine production. Deeds' previous business connections with the aircraft industry had given rise to insinuations for some time. But Borglum's charges, aired in the press, condemned the management of the entire program. The Aero Club of America and the Aeronautical Society joined in condemnation.⁴² Borglum continued to press his charges on all listeners, and there were many. On April 29 he demanded a criminal investigation. Borglum's credibility quickly vanished, however, when there were White House disclosures that he himself had sought personal profit in the aircraft field.⁴³

41. For comments on relations and letters exchanged between Secretary of War Baker, President Wilson, and Borglum, see Palmer, op. cit., II, 185-188.

42. Sweetser, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

43. Ibid., p. 218. See also Congressional Record, 65th Cong., 2nd Sess. (May 10, 1918), LVI, 6326-6330 for a detailed account of Borglum's activities; and for the "official" biography of E.A. Deeds, see Marcossou, op. cit., especially pp. 255-283, in which Deeds is exonerated by his official biographer from the Borglum and later Hughes charges. For another version, see Merlo J. Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1951), I, 374-379.

The Senate Committee on Military Affairs, whose chairman, Senator Chamberlain, seemed eager to believe the worst of the Wilson administration of the war effort, had become "a ready catchall for complaints and criticisms."⁴⁴ A full-scale investigation of aircraft production was begun by this committee on May 29, 1918.⁴⁵ Earlier, a cursory investigation had resulted in two disagreeing reports from the committee.⁴⁶ The majority of this committee reported that production of combat planes had been, to that date, "a substantial failure . . . a most serious disappointment in our war preparations." The majority report concluded that it was convinced that the delay in producing combat planes was due to the ignorance of the art and to failure to organize the effort in such a way as to centralize authority and bring about quick decision.⁴⁷ The minority, composed of three Senators on the Military Affairs Committee, reached a contrary conclusion.

We do not believe that the report of the majority . . . shows a proper estimate of what is being accomplished. . . . On the whole the record of the Signal Corps is one of which every American can be justly proud. In the face of unparalleled difficulty it is accomplishing an unparalleled task.⁴⁸

But the voices of the minority report were small amidst the clamor of attack on the aircraft program from many quarters. President Wilson had repudiated Borglum and appointed a committee to examine his

44. Smith, op. cit., p. 209.

45. U.S. Congress, Senate, Aircraft Production, Hearings before Committee on Military Affairs, 65th Cong., 2nd Sess. (2 vols; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918). See also U.S. Senate, Aircraft Production in the United States, Senate Report No. 555, 65th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918).

46. U.S. Congress, Senate, Investigation of the War Department Aircraft Production, Senate Report No. 380, 65th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), Parts I and II.

47. Ibid., Part I, pp. 3-4.

48. Ibid., Part II, pp. 1, 5.

charges. The press and Congress began to ask pointed questions contrasting the earlier boastful aviation promises and the results achieved. Newsmen became irked by careless releases of information indicating that the program was going well. The President ordered a full inquiry by Attorney General Gregory, but was immediately criticized for having his administration investigate itself. These events occurred in the face of oncoming congressional elections.

Apparently at the suggestion of Colonel House⁴⁹ Wilson called upon his former opponent for the presidency, former Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes, to conduct an investigation of the aircraft program. In a letter to Hughes Wilson stated: "Because of the capital importance of this branch of the military service, I feel that these charges should be thoroughly investigated."⁵⁰

The appointment of the widely respected jurist quelled much of the furor over aircraft production problems. Hughes quietly examined scores of witnesses and took thousands of pages of testimony.⁵¹ His report was not issued until October 25, 1918, on the eve of the Armistice.⁵² But defects in the system were brought to official attention as the investigation proceeded, and Hughes' recent biographer credits him with "greatly stimulating the production of military planes."⁵³ Hughes concluded in his report that "delays and waste were chiefly . . . matters for administrative correction through unification of effort under competent control."⁵⁴ Answering the charges of widespread corruption and thievery, he observed that "The provisions of the criminal statutes do not reach inefficiency."⁵⁵ Hughes had

49. Pusey, op. cit., I, 375.

50. Woodrow Wilson to Charles Evans Hughes, Hughes Papers, quoted in idem.

51. Ibid., p. 378.

52. For a copy of the Hughes Report, see Congressional Record, 65th Cong., 3rd Sess., LVII (December 30, 1918), 883-914.

53. Pusey, op. cit., p. 377.

54. Congressional Record, LVII, 913-914.

55. Ibid., p. 914.

found poor administration, incompetence, and confusion in the program, but only a few minor violations of the law. For these he suggested disciplinary action, including the possible court-martial of Colonel E.A. Deeds. The War Department later considered the Deeds case but took no action.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, President Wilson, utilizing his powers under the Overman Act, by executive order removed the Aviation Section from the Signal Corps,⁵⁷ and established it as a separate unit of the Army as the "Air Service." The President's order created two new organizations in the War Department, a Division of Military Aeronautics and a Bureau of Aircraft Production. These two components reported separately to the Secretary of War. The fundamental duality of Wilson's move was "long to plague the Army air men."⁵⁸ But it was temporarily mitigated by the appointment of a civilian Director of Air Service and as Second Assistant Secretary of War.⁵⁹

With the temporary abatement of congressional and public criticism of the aircraft program, and with the executive reorganizational moves, many of the production difficulties seemed to be alleviated. But the war was to end too soon to see even a belated fulfillment of earlier aircraft promises. According to a contemporary historian,

56. For a detailed defense of Deeds' actions under question see Marcossou, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-283. The Deeds matter was more recently aired in the testimony of Charles E. Wilson and H.E. Talbott, Jr., upon their recent respective consideration by the Senate for appointment as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Air Force, January and February, 1953. See New York Times, January 24, 1953, for excerpts of hearings of January 15 and 23 before Senate Armed Services Committee.

57. Executive Order No. 2682 (May 21, 1918).

58. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 9.

59. War Department General Order No. 81 (August 28, 1918).

Reprinted in R. Earl McClendon, Checklist of Significant Documents . . ., (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: The Air University, 1949), p. 17.

The optimism and enthusiasm of the year before, which had forced the adoption of such an unprecedented program at such an unprecedented speed, now came back as a boomerang to sign the death warrant of those who had voiced it. What the story might have been had there been less optimistic publicity is a question.⁶⁰

Before the height of the protests, rumors and criticisms had been reached in March and April 1918, Congress had not seriously questioned a billion-dollar estimate for the Air Service which was submitted early in 1918. Before that amount was finally approved, later in the year, impatience had been expressed by many members of Congress. While many questions were asked, few legislators were willing to deny a military request at the height of the war.⁶¹ And although there was congressional grumbling, and in spite of impatient, carping and partisan questions about the aircraft program,⁶² the faith in aircraft's potential for speeding victory, if only such aircraft were available, seemed little diminished.

Speaking before the Aeronautical Society of America in New York City on April 25, 1918, Representative John Q. Tilson made the following statement:

What work our airplanes might now do in Picardy and Flanders! What great opportunity for psychological effect if we were ready! . . . a thousand or so ready for action in this great battle would have struck terror to the enemy, and if anything could have broken his morale that would have done it. (Applause)⁶³

Referring to bombing planes, Tilson said, "Great possibilities are offered by the use of airplanes of this kind, and if used in great

60. Sweetser, op. cit., p. 221.

61. For House debate on the Army Appropriation Bill for Fiscal 1919, H.R. 12281, see Congressional Record, 65th Cong., 2nd Sess., LVI (May 28, 1918), 7165 ff.

62. See Congressional Record, LVI, 5920-5932.

63. Reprinted in ibid., pp. A319-322.

numbers, not only against personnel but for wrecking buildings and setting them on fire, would do more than anything else to destroy the enemy and his morale."⁶⁴

A large section of the press, too, clung to its faith in the seemingly magic possibilities of military aircraft. While harping on alleged mismanagement and calling for an official investigation, the Washington Post nonetheless voiced the opinion that

Thousands and perhaps millions of Americans are firmly convinced that the most effective service which the United States can perform in this war is the creation and operation of an aerial army. . . . it should be the duty for the United States to aim for overwhelming superiority in the air.⁶⁵

Thus, while there was dissatisfaction, sometimes bitter and often partisan, with the progress of aircraft production, the faith in what airplanes could do, if available, in ending the war seemed little diminished. So it seemed, at least, in civilian and congressional circles.

64. Ibid., p. A321.

65. Washington Post (April 22, 1918,) reprinted in Congressional Record, LVI, A322.

CHAPTER IV
AERIAL OPERATIONS IN THE WAR

"The World War made the Air Service . . ." wrote war-time Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March.¹ And although few questioned this assertion there was widespread debate about exactly what the war had made of it. Out of this debate were to emerge the basic issues figuring in the formulation of post-war military aviation policy.

One of the central issues, and perhaps the most important in congressional decision-making of 1926 was the relative importance of independently-conceived missions for military aviation. There was near unanimity after the war's end on the auxiliary value of aviation operating closely with ground armies, and for this there was adequate experience in World War I to establish at least its potentialities. But the merit and validity of independent missions was, for the most part, theoretical.

The record of America's aeronautical effort in the first World War is to be had in scattered fragments. There is nothing comparable to the six-volume British work, The War in the Air,² which the Committee on Imperial Defence wisely authorized through its Historical Section, and which is based on official documents. The studies available on the American Air Service tend to the apologetic or the polemic. For example, the most complete factual and statistical record of the aeronautical effort in the war was compiled because of the author's feeling that "After the war this effort was belittled and misrepresented."³

1. March, op. cit., p. 198.

2. H.A. Jones and Walter Raláigh (6 vols. and Appendices, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922-1937).

3. Gorrell, op. cit., p. 77.

Another account of the Air Service in the war explains quite frankly that the book was written "to demonstrate the necessity of a preparedness program for our air force."⁴ It will not be attempted here to give a detailed analysis of the military operations of the Air Service, but rather the more significant events which occurred in 1917 and 1918 - events which seem to have affected the post-war developments of military air policy - will be presented.⁵

Much of the raw material for an official history of the Air Service, American Expeditionary Forces, was assembled in the form of reports on all activities undertaken or accomplished by the Air Service. On the day of the Armistice these were ordered to be compiled, and were put together in final form as the Final Report of the Chief of the Air Service, AEF. This is said to be a document of about sixty volumes, including several thousand photographs, charts and tabulations. But, unfortunately, only one copy of this was filed, in typewritten form, "in the vaults of the War Department in Washington" and it has been generally inaccessible.⁶ Using this report, however, Colonel Gorrell has synthesized the major facts in his valuable statistical study.

The story of America's first World War aeronautical effort is generally told by its friendly historians as what "might have been."⁷ But in retrospect, in the period between April, 1917 and November, 1918, the gigantic project of planning, production, training and over-all

4. H.A. Toulmin, Jr., Air Service, AEF, 1918, (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1927), pp. iv-v.

5. For a still valuable account of World War I air activities, see Sweetser, op. cit.

6. Gorrell, op. cit., p. vi.

7. The phrases "might have been" and "might have seen" are used four times in a brief but concise account of the Air Service in World War I in The Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 3-16.

management was a considerable accomplishment. Nonetheless a partisan Senate investigating committee could find grounds to satisfy itself that the aircraft production program had been a "failure, occasioned by a record of stupidity and stubbornness that involved inexcusable waste of men and money and invited military disaster."⁸ Histories as written by congressional investigating committees, however, more often than not leave something to be desired.

Clearly there were great expectations for military aircraft and clearly there was much stumbling along the way to production of airplanes in quantity. In light of these factors, what were the actual accomplishments of American aircraft in military operations? Since the interpretation of the actual experience with aircraft in combat, as well as the theories of their utilization and the actual record of industrial production were to be significant factors in the formulation of post-war military air policy, it is necessary to summarize the record of aircraft achievements in actual combat against Germany.

America's production failure at home was bound to be reflected in operations at the battlefield. In fact, France and Italy saw not one American-designed combat plane during the war. Writing years later of the nation's first World War experiences with aircraft, General Arnold said:

It was Hindenburg, not Pershing, who said, grimly, in November, 1918: "The war was decided by the American Infantry." In those battles, and in the first tactically massed air strength in history at St. Mihiel and again on the Meuse, the American air service flew hard and well in support of that infantry victory, and this, in spite of Monday morning quarterback tales, was its only function.

8. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, Subcommittee No. 1, Aviation, Report No. 637, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), Part I, p. 3.

What might have happened had the finger been pulled out of the dike at home, as some historians like to say, and had our air manpower and our aviation production reached the massive output that might have come if the war had lasted a year longer, is beside the point. American troops dominated the final Allied advance, and American aviators, in proportional numbers, were part of it.⁹

The initial plan for an aviation force of the American Expeditionary Forces was not completed until September 18, 1917, and called for deployment in France by the end of June, 1919, of 260 tactical, 36 training, and 90 replacement squadrons. By the following May this overly-ambitious plan had been trimmed to a total of 202 combat squadrons instead of the 386.¹⁰ But by the war's end on November 11, only 45 American squadrons were assigned to front-line duty. This total was made up of 20 pursuit, 18 observation, 1 night, and 6 day bombing squadrons.¹¹

The commander of the AEF in Europe was having the counterpart of the organizational troubles at home with aircraft, and there were personal and personnel repercussions which were to affect later intra-Army relationships.

From the diary of "Billy" Mitchell comes the following comment:

The General Staff is now [April, 1918] trying to run the Air Service with just as much knowledge of it as a hog knows about skating. It is terrible to have to fight with an organization of this kind, instead of devoting all our attention to the powerful enemy on the front. . . . I have had many talks with General Pershing . . . some of them very heated, with much pounding on the table on both sides. One time he told me that if I kept

9. Arnold, op. cit., p. 58.

10. See Sweetser, op. cit., pp. 232-235; also Mason M. Patrick, The United States in the Air, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p.17.

11. Gorrell, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

insisting that the organization of the Air Service be changed he would send me home. I answered that if he did he would come soon after me.¹²

Writing in his diary early in 1918, the AEF Commander, General Pershing, had observed:

Aviation questions demanded unremitting attention, for in no other service was unpreparedness so evident and so difficult to overcome. Apparently there was much earnest effort at home, but it was too often misdirected.¹³

Chief of Staff March criticized Pershing for the frequent changes of technical details for aircraft which emanated from Pershing's European headquarters and were sent to the home front in late 1917 and early 1918.¹⁴

In this minor skirmish of the memoirs, Pershing seems to have been answering March's criticism of him on this point when he wrote:

"In the AEF differences of opinion and the consequent lack of cooperation among aviation officers upon whom rested the task of organization and training caused confusion and loss of time."¹⁵ Then he continued:

... the difficulties of its organization were naturally inherent to those of any newly formed unit. The lack of a well-considered scheme worked out in time of peace was sorely felt. Differences in the views of the senior officers of the corps were not easily reconciled. Jealousies existed among them, no one had the confidence of all the others and thus it was not easy to select from among the officers of the corps any outstanding executive.¹⁶

Pershing found his "outstanding executive" in the person of Brigadier General Mason M. Patrick, Pershing's West Point classmate and a member of the Corps of Engineers. To the consternation of some of the leading

12. Quoted in Roger Burlingame, General Billy Mitchell, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), pp. 84-85; see also Levine, op. cit., pp. 89-172.

13. Pershing, op. cit., I, 285.

14. March, op. cit., p. 207.

15. Pershing, op. cit., I, 285.

16. Ibid., p. 333.

airmen, Patrick was appointed Pershing's Chief of the Air Service on May 29, 1918. "Billy" Mitchell and B.D. Foulois had been considered contenders for that position. But there were signs of friction between "the red-tape cutting Mitchell and General Foulois."¹⁷ The appointment of Patrick was a decision that, in the words of General Arnold, "affected the development of the American Air Corps for the next decade."¹⁸ Pershing's summons to Patrick was phrased as follows:

In this Army there is but one thing that is causing anxiety, and that is the Air Service. In it there are a lot of good men but they are running around in circles. Someone has got to make them go straight. I want you to do it.¹⁹

As noted earlier, Mitchell's influence had been great in prompting the Ribot cable, and in setting into motion the tremendous aircraft production program. As commander of all combat air units under Pershing, what use was he to make of the limited results ~~his earlier enthusiasm~~ had helped to produce? Mitchell believed the airplane to be primarily an offensive weapon in war; he had felt the only true defense against aircraft was other aircraft; he was developing great faith in well-planned bombing efforts; and he even conceived plans for the use of airborne troops.²⁰

The Air Service, by the end of the war, had never received the equipment by which any of these theories could be adequately tested in battle. As we have seen, most of the air activity of United States forces was in routine reconnaissance and patrol duty. But there were at least two large scale operations with what might be considered a sizeable "air force." These took place in connection with large military

17. Arnold, op. cit., p. 80.

18. Idem.

19. Quoted in idem.

20. See Levine, op. cit., pp. 92-97, 146-152.

offensives late in the war, and are worth noting here. They were the St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne operations which culminated in the Armistice of November 11. In the operations against the St. Mihiel salient planned for late September, Mitchell had drawn up plans for the use of 1,500 planes. This was to be the largest aerial effort of the war. The plan called for the complete Allied superiority of the air over the field of battle. As it turned out, the forces for these operations consisted of 1,481 planes. Only 609 of these were from American squadrons, the remainder being supplied by Allied forces. According to official and partisan accounts of these operations, they were highly successful, with local air superiority being maintained throughout the battle. Only about one-third of the air force was attached directly to ground operations. The rest, being divided into two brigades, were used "independently" to strike at the flanks of the salient and to attack communications and supplies at the rear. In spite of unfavorable weather, these aerial operations were well planned, well executed, and "contributed effectively to the American victory."²¹ At any rate, the over-all operations proved successful for the Allied forces, and in spite of the post-mortem arguments, aircraft played a major, if debatable, role in the successful attack against the Germans.

21. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 14. See also Mitchell's version in "The Air Service at St. Mihiel," World's Work, XXXVIII (August, 1919), 360-370; "Final Report of the Chief of Air Service, AEF," (Washington, 1921), reprinted in Air Service Information Circular, Vol. II, No. 180, February 15, 1921 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921); Arnold, op. cit., pp. 81-83; Levine, op. cit., pp. 89 ff. Later, before the Morrow Board, Major General Charles P. Summerall submitted extracts from operational intelligence reports during the St. Mihiel phase of the Meuse-Argonne operations to indicate that "air superiority" had not prevented enemy action against American troops. "Everything had been done by our planes to prevent the enemy planes from asserting themselves, but here time after time is shown the activity of the enemy planes. They could not be stopped...." Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 1225. General Summerall was attempting in his testimony to stress the limitations of aircraft in military operations, based on experiences in the war.

In the second and major phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the last major battle of the war, the Air Service was not able to muster so large a force as in the operation staged against the St. Mihiel salient, since only American units were usually available. But Mitchell continued to adhere to the principle of concentration of forces. Air forces were used to protect ground forces from enemy air attack and to bomb enemy communications, troop concentrations and air fields. In one of the major Allied bombardment efforts of the war, on October 9, a force of about 200 bombers, including some French units, conducted a raid against enemy reserves massing for a counterattack. Within twenty-four hours, sixty-nine tons of bombs were dropped "with telling effect. It was probably the Air Service's most notable bombardment effort during the war."²²

The tonnage of the bombs dropped in this operation equalled almost half of the total tonnage dropped by the American Air Service in the entire war, and is obviously not impressive by today's standards. But to some at that time, and to many since, this now unspectacular bombing effort was the harbinger of things to come. An Associated Press dispatch at the time read:

The bombing squadrons which made up this air fleet probably represent the first definite American unit of major importance in the independent air forces which are being built up. . . . The work of the independent force is bombing munitions works, factories, cities, and other important centers far behind the German lines. . . . Berlin itself will know what an air raid means, and the whole great project is a direct answer to the German air attacks on helpless and unfortified British, French and Belgian cities. ²³

22. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 552-560; see also Mitchell's "The Air Service at the Argonne-Meuse," World's Work, XXXVIII (September 1919), pp. 552-560; and Levine, loc. cit.

23. Quoted in Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 15. The bombing attack as described, however, was a tactical rather than strategic bombing operation.

Such predictions might have materialized by 1919, but by the war's end the American Air Service had not begun any large-scale bombing attacks. Strategic bombing was to be a major element in the air power doctrine developed and preached in the post-war period, but there was to be little opportunity to test it during the war.

Official minutes of the Interallied Aviation Committee of the Supreme War Council indicate, however, that serious discussion occurred in July of 1918 of the "immediate formation of a permanent and specialized long distance bombing force."²⁴ This action seems to have been prompted as a retaliatory move to German bombing of Allied cities, rather than as a doctrine of the use of air power. The committee could reach no unanimity on the question of establishing a long distance bombing force, and requested the matter be referred to the Supreme War Council.²⁵ By the war's end the total amount of bombs dropped by the United States Air Service was 138 tons; the deepest penetration of enemy territory, 160 miles.²⁶ There was no bombing by American units which can be classified as a truly "independent mission," although such an inter-Allied independent mission, as has been noted, was under consideration.

The British, on the other hand, as early as June 6, 1918, had established an independent air force under Major General Hugh M. Trenchard. Trenchard's air thinking greatly influenced that of Mitchell and other American air enthusiasts. His concept of behind-the-lines bombing, and a "unified" or "independent" air force were significant influence on the post-war formulation of American air doctrine.²⁷ The RAF's Independent Force, under Trenchard, had strategic

24. Minutes, Interallied Aviation Committee, Versailles, July 24, 1918, in "Policy Forming Documents, AEF," United States Army in the World War, Historical Division, Department of the Army, II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), 548-549.

25. Idem.

26. Gorrell, op. cit., p. 52.

27. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 12-13; Levine, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

bombardment as its mission. By October, 1918, arrangements for an Inter-allied Independent Air Force, with the role of behind-the-lines bombardment, had been made.²⁸ The American Air Service was never equipped during the war for a strategic bombardment role. Plans were underway, however, for an independent bombing organization in collaboration with the British when the war ended.²⁹

In regard to the major doctrine of air power to be developed after the war - the doctrine of strategic bombing - there was therefore little in American experience during the war to present as supporting evidence. As suggested, the story is one of what "might have been." In summary, plans were being made at the war's end for an inter-allied long-distance bombing force; for American strategic bombing units; and even for an operation dropping fighting men behind the enemy lines by parachutes.³⁰ General H.H. Arnold has suggested that "Billy" Mitchell felt that "the Armistice was an untimely interruption - as if the whistle had ended the game just as he was about to go over the goal line."³¹

In the words of the historians of the United States air forces:

Had the [First] World War lasted long enough to provide the Air service with some experience in a bombardment program conceived independently of the movements of ground armies, its postwar history might have been far different. For in the interim between the two wars, the relative importance of such an air mission became the crucial issue in the development of air power. 32

The measure of America's first World War aeronautical effort may be indicated by the following figures: the front-line airplane

28. For these developments, see H.A. Jones, The War in the Air, VI, especially 101-117.

29. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 16.

30. See Arnold, op. cit., pp. 85-86; Jones, op. cit., VI, 1-27, 101-117; Toulmin, op. cit., esp. Chap. 15, and Levine, op. cit., pp. 148-150.

31. Arnold, op. cit., p. 86.

32. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 16. [Italics mine].

strength of the United States on November 11, 1918, was 740 planes. This compares with France's 3,321; Germany's 2,730; Great Britain's 1,758; and Italy's 812.³³ At war's end, the United States actually had 8,403 planes of all kinds, 4,865 of which were in the United States. Of the 3,538 in use by the American Expeditionary Forces, only the 740 were actually at the front.³⁴ A majority of America's front-line planes had been obtained from foreign sources, particularly France.³⁵ The forty-five aerial squadrons at the front at war's end had an assigned personnel of 774 pilots, 457 observers, and 23 aerial gunners.³⁶

Summing up the total record of America's aeronautical effort, E.S. Gorrell has written:

We started with nothing - not even blue prints - not even experience. We succeeded in building a splendid Air Force, in placing desirable American-built planes at the Front, in creating and supplying one of the best, if not the best, of all aeronautical engines, and in supplying vast quantities of sorely needed material to our Allies. 37

A congressional committee majority after the war found, on the other hand, "the aircraft program a record of "failure," while a minority report of the same committee would stress the "worthy accomplishments" of the Air Service at home and abroad during the war.³⁸ After taking 3,880 pages of testimony in hearings, committee members could reach opposite conclusions regarding the war-time aircraft program. But while the committee could not agree in judging

33. Gorrell, op. cit., chart on p. 58.

34. Ibid., p. 39.

35. Ibid., p. 35.

36. Ibid., p. 25.

37. Ibid., p. 77.

38. House Report No. 637, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., Parts I and II.

the aircraft production and management effort on the home front during the war, apparently for partisan reasons, the committee did reach one significant agreement. Both the majority and minority reports concluded unequivocally that governmental agencies dealing with aircraft should be reorganized.³⁹

Said the majority report:

Practically every witness examined on the subject of future American air service united in a plea for separate independent control The future of aviation is beyond our present dreams of understanding, and our Government must do her full part in leading its development. 40

The minority report concluded that "aircraft has become a vital means of offensive and defensive warfare."⁴¹ It called for a "separate Air service, with authority to coordinate experimentation, purchase, and production" as a civilian agency. But it would not establish a separate military air department.⁴² There was in fact a curious difference here. While the majority put the future of aviation "beyond our present dreams," the minority took a much more limited view. The latter stated:

Military aviation never can be anything other than simply an arm of the military organization. Effective military operations depend upon cooperative training and unified control over planning and execution. Such a separate air department would jeopardize the first element and probably destroy the latter two. 43

While the committee was divided over the aircraft production record, and united in the belief that organizational changes were

39. Ibid., Part I, p. 70; Part II, pp. 69-70.

40. Ibid., Part I, p. 70.

41. Ibid., Part II, p. 69.

42. Ibid., Part II, p. 70.

43. Ibid.

needed, they were quite vague in their reorganizational recommendations. Yet it is clear that members were in fundamental disagreement regarding the lessons and experience of the war as they pertained to the potential role of aircraft in future military planning. The majority, composed chiefly of Republicans, without being specific, saw unknown possibilities in the development and use of aircraft. The minority, while claiming to be "not particularly qualified to give advice on aviation matters," nonetheless believed that "some conclusions may be safely drawn from our Nation's experience in war."⁴⁴ And one of these conclusions, as indicated above, was that military aircraft could never be more than an auxiliary; that is to say, no separate, independent mission such as strategic bombing, was foreseen for aircraft.

In these contradictory conclusions reached by members of a House aviation subcommittee are found the basic elements of the post-war controversy over air power. The underlying question was whether the military airplane was genus or species. To some it was simply another auxiliary weapon to be used in accordance with established military structure and existing military doctrines. To others it was a revolutionary weapon demanding fundamental revisions of military doctrine and national defense structure. The final determination of which of these interpretations would prevail ultimately had to be made under constitutional authority by the Congress. In following chapters the development of this issue will be traced, and its resolution by Congress in 1926 will be described.

44. Ibid., Part II, p. 69.

PART II

Among the most significant conditioning elements in the shaping of national security policies are the domestic and international environments in which those policies are made. A representative system of government is in general sensitive to the popular outlook on world affairs, and to other elements in the domestic environment which tend to condition the alternatives of national policy-makers within a given international setting.

The decisions of 1925-1926 regarding national aviation policy were made in a setting largely conditioned by the prevailing concepts of national security. For example, the difficulty of national leaders, scanning the vast expanses of ocean on either side of the American continent, in sighting an enemy on either the eastern or western horizon, was to affect vitally the national military establishment. In such an era, America's security seemed unthreatened and this produced military retrenchment, accompanied by disillusionment and disgust with war and machines of warfare. There was also a heavy suspicion of the machinations of foreign nations. In such an atmosphere, the changes advocated by radical groups within the military establishment seemed to have little chance of success.

To better understand the actions of the major actors in the complex legislative process, it is necessary to give an adequate description of how the interested groups in the legislative struggle resulting in the Air Corps Act of 1926 viewed the outside world and America's military security needs therein.

The advent of aircraft that could, potentially at least, transcend traditional geographical barriers which had long been a vital influence on national security policies, produced a debate among the policy-makers as to aviation's true significance to the nation's military security needs.

Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of the process by which the decisions were reached in 1925-26 and ultimately of the Air Corps Act itself, it is necessary to describe, in Part II, some significant prevailing concepts of national security of the mid-1920s.

CHAPTER V

SOME CIVILIAN CONCEPTS OF NATIONAL SECURITY DISARMAMENT

In the mid-1920s, a member of the Senate Military Affairs Committee called upon President Coolidge to urge his approval and support for additional funds for Army and Navy aircraft. After listening to the Senator's argument at some length, the President gave his negative reply with the terse comment: "Who's gonna fight us?"¹

"The course a country takes in the matter of national defense is a good barometer of its outlook on world affairs."² President Coolidge's remark to a Connecticut Senator, therefore, reveals a clue to much of the thinking about American national security in the 1920s. Looking out across the wide and deep oceans between the United States and Europe and Asia, and glancing at the relatively powerless nations on the northern and southern boundaries of the United States, the President saw no enemies. He thus proceeded to shape his national defense policies accordingly.

Yet there were those who were loudly proclaiming that the advent of a new means of transportation and communication, in a new dimension, no longer permitted such a comfortable assessment of national security. Aircraft, as a potential weapon of war, it was argued, called for a modification of traditional national security concepts. Thereby were generated doctrinal and organizational

1. The Senator was Hiram Bingham, Republican, of Connecticut. Interview, April 15, 1953.

2. Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between the Wars, (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1944), p. 365.

controversies about national defense policies which prompted the decisions of 1926 in Congress on military air policy.

In order to understand those decisions of 1926, it is necessary to examine the prevailing concepts of national security following the World War, as these were to provide a substantial part of the setting in which decisions were made. America's outlook on world affairs was indeed to condition the structure and size of the national defense establishment, and to have its effect upon the competing doctrines of warfare.

The decisions that were made by the principal actors in the military air policy deliberations of 1925-1926 were based upon the major alternatives as seen by them, and conditioned by the political realities of the period. In order to generalize about "America's outlook" it is essential first to explore the outlook and alternatives as seen by the major groups participating sometimes indirectly in the decision-making process, and who contributed separately to what may be called, generally, "America's outlook."

This chapter, then, will describe the highlights of the atmosphere in which the debate and decisions on post-war military air policy were reached. No attempt will be made here to write the foreign policy history of the period, but illustrations will be given from which generalizations can be made about the background of the congressional decisions of 1926.

The period under consideration is often referred to as a time of "isolation," "reaction," of returning to "normalcy," or even by some as the "incredible era." It is a period widely characterized by historians as one of reckless abandon in the United States. One scholar has designated this period in retrospect as "the Fools Paradise of American History." He also asserted that American foreign policy

"degenerated into five postulates: isolation, anti-imperialism, disarmament, neutrality, pacifism."³ In the words of another observer of these times, it was "an America gone money-mad, isolationist, and super-nationalistic."⁴

The United States came out of the war as the dominant military and economic power in the world. Not only was the nation transformed from an international debtor to a creditor, but its armed strength showed a potential dominance. The United States Navy threatened to reach equality with, and perhaps surpass, a previously indomitable British Navy. "A Navy second to none," was a popular slogan of the day in some circles and was soon to be promulgated as the official policy of the Navy itself. "To create, maintain, and operate a navy second to none," were the words of an official naval policy statement in 1924.⁵

But the nation's newly won economic and military power fell into the lap of a sometimes reluctant, sometimes unwilling, and often inexperienced leadership in government. The Republican Party, ascending into power late in the war, and in control of the administration in the post-war years, was reluctant to accept world leadership with its many responsibilities. The nation's new leaders were sometimes unwilling to join in positive schemes of collective security at the risk of relinquishing any national independence of

3. Samuel F. Bemis, "The Shifting Strategy of American Defense and Diplomacy," in Essays in History and International Relations in Honor of George H. Blakeslee, ed. by Dwight E. Lee and George E. McReynolds, (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1949), p. 9.

4. Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947), pp. 339-340.

5. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Appropriations, "United States Naval Policy," Hearing on Navy Department Appropriation Bill for 1925, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), p. 39.

action whatsoever. And they often seemed inexperienced in the delicate task of being the world's banker.⁶

President Woodrow Wilson had dramatically presented the alternatives of post-war American policy as a destructive militarism or a world organization for collective security. The nation, under the leadership of Presidents Harding and Coolidge, chose neither alternative, seeking, instead, a "national defense," of the most likely resemblance to the status quo.

To Present Coolidge, the potential enemies of the security of the United States were not Japan, Great Britain, France or Russia, but war debts, high taxation, or a "depleted treasury." "A country loaded with debt is a country devoid of the first line of defense," Coolidge told Congress at the end of 1926. "Economy is the handmaid of preparedness," he said, and "dollars are the shock troops," in any modern military campaign.⁷ While Coolidge recommended an Army and Navy for the United States, "proportionate to its population, the extent of its territory, and the dignity of the place which it occupies in the world," his preoccupation seems to have been with the defense of the United States Treasury. Those who seemed to be threatening the security of the Treasury included former Allies who were reluctant to pay their large-scale war debts to the United States, as well as members of the "cult of disparagement"⁸ especially in the Navy and Air Service, who insisted that the nation's defense forces were inadequate.

6. For a contemporary view by a Frenchman of "Uncle Shylock," see Andre Siegfried, America Comes of Age, trans. by H.H. and Doris Hemming, (New York: Harcourt-Brace and Co., 1927), esp. pp. 226 ff.

7. Message of the President of the United States to Congress, December 7, 1926, reprinted in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1926, I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), xxiii.

8. This is Coolidge's term, in idem.

It is apparent that the outlook on world affairs taken by the various groups participating in the formulation of national security policy varied considerably. On the one hand, Congress and the public could be told that, "The former isolation of the United States is a thing of the past," and that the nation was then, by 1925, vulnerable to an attack by enemy aircraft. Land frontiers and ocean barriers no longer afforded the protection of old, they were told by the country's most outspoken air enthusiast.⁹ On the other hand, Congress, the President, and the public were assured by others that in 1925 there was "no present reason for apprehension of any invasion from overseas directly by way of air; nor, indeed, is there any apparent probability of such an invasion in any future which can be foreseen."¹⁰ Thus assurances were given from a respectable source that the geographical isolation of the United States had not been disturbed by technological developments in communications and transportation. The oceans were still the great bulwarks of defense. America was secure at home, but what about the nation's world interests? What policy of national security was to be adopted in light of interests beyond the shores of the United States?

The period of the mid-1920s is usually referred to as a period of isolation in American foreign policy. It is sometimes asserted that the policy of "national defense" - defense, that is, of the boundaries of the American continent - was the well-established national security policy of the United States. Yet, rather than a period of isolation, it seems to have been a period of national

9. William Mitchell, Winged Defense. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1925), p. xi.

10. U.S. President's Aircraft Board, Report, November 30 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 10. Hereafter cited as Morrow Board Report.

independence of action. If national defense was the accepted concept of national security, it was defense of the status quo insofar as this was feasible, not just within the boundaries of the United States, but also in Europe, the Far East, and in all areas in which the nation had economic interests, including, traditionally, Latin America.

If isolation were the policy of the Government in power in 1924, the opposition party, the Democrats, certainly did not think so. In the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in New York City in June, 1924, Senator Pat Harrison proclaimed, amidst a burst of applause, "Show this [Republican] Administration an oil well and it will show you a foreign policy."¹¹ Nor was it in an isolationist vein that the United States Navy asserted, over the signature of Secretary Edwin Denby, that the policy of the Navy was to be strong enough "for exercising ocean-wide economic pressure," this function being second in importance only to strength for battle.¹²

That the prevailing concept of national security was independence of action in foreign affairs, rather than strict isolation, is well illustrated by the comment recorded in the diary of Joseph C. Grew in 1924 regarding the policy of the United States toward the League of Nations. Grew, assuming duty as Undersecretary of State to Charles Evans Hughes, noted that the United States was "well out of Leagues and should stay out of them." But the League was doing good work in various directions, and he advised that the United States "treat it with the same courtesy and respect as we would the Standard Oil Company or any other recognized institution."¹³ It seems evident

11. Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1924, Official Report (Indianapolis: Democratic National Committee, 1924), p.20.

12. "U.S. Naval Policy," Hearing on Navy Department Appropriation Bill for 1925, p. 39.

13. Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era, ed. by Walter Johnson, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1952), I, 639.

that the Standard Oil Company, however, was higher in the regard of many in the Republican administration than the League of Nations at this time.

Woodrow Wilson, in 1919, saw no alternative to membership in the League of Nations than that the United States become a military state. In his western tour in the fall of 1919, to sell the people on the merits of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations, Wilson warned in a speech at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, that the choice was between the old system or his new system of international collective security. If America chose the old system, he warned,

Every man would have to train in arms. We would have to have a great standing army. We would have to have accumulations of military materiel. . . . You would have a military government in spirit if not in form. ¹⁴

Almost three weeks later President Wilson collapsed, apparently having not convinced the nation that the alternatives were thus limited, and certainly not having convinced a majority of members of the Senate to support his aims. But Wilson was as adamant as the opposition in the Senate, and when the treaty was voted upon, with the numerous reservations attached by the Senate, it was rejected by the combined votes of Wilsonian supporters on the one hand and Republican "irreconcilables" on the other.

Having rejected the League, was America to turn, then, under new Republican leadership, to Wilson's other alternative - the creation of a garrison state, with large military forces, supported by burdensome taxation? There had been a strong move to establish a large post-war standing army and universal military training in

14. September 8, 1919 in President [Woodrow] Wilson, Addresses . . . on His Western Tour, September 4 to September 25, 1919, U.S. Senate Document No. 120, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 85 and passim.

1919 and 1920. Such a move was supported by the Army Chief of Staff and Secretary of War.¹⁵ But this move failed, not because of proclivity for the League of Nations in Congress, but because of the post-war reaction to war which boosted the traditional attitudes against large standing armies. The power of the National Guard organizations in influencing Senators and Congressmen was also undoubtedly a significant factor in producing the compromise National Defense Act of 1920,¹⁶ which rejected the extremes of putting all faith in a large professional standing army on the one hand, or a largely federalistic system of national guard units on the other. Hearings and debates on this legislation, however, produced divergent opinions as to what the post-war military posture of the United States should be, but the prevailing opinion accepted neither of President Wilson's alternatives.¹⁷ A majority of Senators and Representatives were inclined, in 1920, to seek a path other than those two discovered by the former President.

Enthusiasts for building the most powerful Navy in the world were also to be stopped in their tracks by the prevailing post-war mood of Congress, where there was an attitude of unwillingness to take seriously Wilson's threat of militarism if his world organization plan was not approved. And while the Navy was to remain the strongest arm of the nation's defense organization and strategy, its size was to

15. For a still very useful account of this period, see John Dickinson, op.cit., especially Chapter IX, "The Army Act of 1920," pp. 323-377.

16. 41 Stat. 759 (June 4, 1920).

17. For a cataloguing of various points of view, see Edward Brooke Lee, Jr., The Politics of Our Military National Defense, printed as U.S. Senate Document No. 274, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess. (August 28, 1940), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 67-110.

be limited in the alternative to militarism or internationalism soon to be chosen by the Harding and Coolidge administrations.¹⁸

The resurgence to power of the Republican Party in the late period of, and after, the war, was also marked by the reassertion of congressional power. Neither Harding nor Coolidge seemed inclined or determined to assert the leadership that Wilson had given to Congress prior to, and more especially during, the war. Harding had, in fact, pledged during the presidential campaign that what he considered to be party government, that is, government by Congress, would be restored in place of what he thought was the personal, sometimes dictatorial government of Wilson.¹⁹

National defense as such was not a direct issue in the political campaign of 1920, although the League of Nations was. A comparison of the two major party statements on national defense shows that the Republicans were chiefly concerned with condemning the Democrats for "inexcusable failure to make timely preparations" for the late war, and citing the "failure" of the aircraft production program.²⁰ The Democrats seemed content to express admiration for the work of the soldiers and sailors in the war, and to praise the leadership of President Wilson.

But in the words of the Democratic Party candidate, "The League of Nations in the presidential campaign of 1920 was to be

18. For an account of the development of naval policy in this period, see Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, (Princeton: University Press, 1940), pp. 47 ff.; see also C. Leonard Hoag, Preface to Preparedness, (Washington: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), pp. 20 ff.

19. W.E. Binkley, The Powers of the President, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1937), pp. 237-238; see also Harding's Speech of Acceptance, Republican Campaign Textbook, (New York: Republican National Committee, 1920), pp. 35 ff.

20. Republican National Committee, Republican Campaign Handbook, 1920, pp. 107, 235.

the overshadowing issue."²¹ Because of what James M. Cox called the "great conspiracy" in the Senate and elsewhere to discredit the League,²² the campaign was to be a "battle against odds."²³ Cox valiantly fought the battle for those who believed the best protection of the national security was in an international organization that could effectively control aggression. He considered the campaign to discredit and defeat the League a deliberate plot in which "the peace effort of a war-weary world was sacrificed on the altar of partisan politics."²⁴

The Republican standard-bearer thought differently. As a Senator, Harding had spoken against the League in Senate debate, terming it a "supergovernment of the world . . . the Government of the United States is good enough for me."²⁵ In the campaign Candidate Harding made some oblique references to the need for an "association of nations," but flatly rejected the League.

I understand the position of the Democratic candidate and he understands mine. . . . It is that he favors going into the Paris League and I favor staying out.²⁶

Later, shortly before his death, President Harding could proclaim to his St. Louis audience that "In the face of the overwhelming verdict of 1920, therefore, the issue of the League of Nations is as dead as slavery."²⁷ But what course of action in world affairs was indicated by the "overwhelming verdict" of the electorate in 1920?

21. James M. Cox, Journey Through My Years, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 264.

22. Ibid., pp. 246-264.

23. Ibid., pp. 265-283.

24. Ibid., p. 254.

25. Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., LVIII, 8791-8792.

26. Speech at Des Moines, October 7, 1920, New York Times (October 8, 1920), quoted in Ruhl J. Bartlett, The Record of American Diplomacy, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), pp. 480-481.

27. Speech at St. Louis, Mo., June 21, 1923 in Warren G. Harding, Speeches and Addresses, compiled by James W. Murphy, (Washington, 1923), pp. 39-40.

Harding, when in office, was soon to discover that there was widespread public sentiment supporting the belief in some congressional quarters that the nation's military and naval forces were larger than needed, even though they were smaller than the General Staff or General Board were inclined to recommend.²⁸

A good majority of the voters may have rejected Wilson's vision for a world organization to preserve peace, but undoubtedly his idealism and eloquent advocacy of his beliefs placed a challenge before his opponents as they assumed power. There was, of course, a group of influential Republicans who favored United States' participation in an international organization. Certain segments of Wilson's vision, namely the concept of disarmament and the idea of a world court, were to be borrowed and incorporated into the program of the Republican administration. The policy of disarmament, or more precisely, the limitation of armaments, was to be forced upon an unwilling administration, whereas a few years later, the policy of joining the Permanent Court of International Justice - the World Court - was to be submitted to a reluctant Senate.

The sentiment of pacifism and the widespread desire for retrenchment in government spending had foiled the plans of the professional Army leaders who wanted a large standing army and universal training in 1920. "Because" the forces of pacifism, nationalism, and a creeping disillusionment regarding the recent war were gradually increasing in the early 1920s, Congress had clearly rejected the advice of its top professional military leaders regarding

28. See, for example, Harold and Margaret Sprout, "The Popular Revolt against Navalism," in Toward a New Order of Sea Power, pp. 100-117.

the size and organization of the Army.²⁹ How was this reaction to affect the defense institution that may have seemed more in keeping with isolationist sentiment - the Navy?

Again, professional leaders in the Navy were advising the policy of a Navy "second to none," which implied at least parity with the British fleet and enough naval force to protect American interests in the Pacific, especially vis a vis the rising star of Japan. The existence of an Anglo-Japanese Alliance at this time was significant in conditioning national security thinking. Although President Harding had referred vaguely in the presidential campaign to an "association of nations" which might permit America to reduce armaments, upon election he obviously was unwilling to take an early move in this direction. It is very likely that professional Army and Navy advice being channeled to him warned against disarmament moves.³⁰ But, as noted earlier, this was a period of congressional resurgence, and from the Senate came the successful move, **under** the leadership of Senator William E. Borah, to summon a conference of nations for the purpose of limiting armaments. The result was the Washington Conference of 1921-1922.

Much can be deduced about American concepts of national security from an examination of the results of the Washington Conference. The outlook of administration leaders on world affairs can be seen in the negotiations at the conference. The negotiations and

29. For an account of the development of strong pacifist movements in the 1920s, see Robert H. Ferrell, Peace in Their Time, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

30. For a resumé of naval and public opinion, see the Sprouts, loc. cit., and also C. Leonard Hoag, op. cit., pp. 33 ff.

results also indicate the attitude of the various participating nations toward technological advancements in the implements of warfare. For, as Nicholas J. Spykman has observed:

In a disarmament conference a state formulates its requirements for territorial security both at home and overseas, and these requirements are inevitably relative to the military strength of other states. But the statement of military needs is not only an estimate of the means necessary to assure territorial safety, it is also a confession of power aspirations both regional and extra-regional. . . . A naval disarmament conference becomes, therefore, a paper war in which each delegation tries to preserve its own fleet and to sink as much of the other fleets as possible. 31

The task of interpreting America's post-war world position, and of defining her "power aspirations" fell upon the negotiators at the Washington Conference. The conference was held in an atmosphere of uneasy relationships among the Allies who cooperated in the defeat of Germany. The German war machine in being had been demolished as the war's consequence. And the German fleet had been eliminated from its position as a threat to Great Britain and the United States, especially in the Atlantic Ocean. This left Great Britain as the holder of unquestioned naval power in the Atlantic, with the only serious competition being the plans of American admirals to build a United States Navy "second to none."

France was obsessed with guaranteeing her territorial integrity on the continent against future German power, and was also intent upon being considered a world power. Britain and France were developing

31. America's Strategy in World Politics, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942), p. 168.

basic disagreements about how strong Germany should become without endangering their interests.³²

In the Far East, Japan had continued her rise to a powerful position in the western Pacific, and with growing naval power threatened both British and American interests, particularly in China and the Philippines. Anglo-American relations were strained in 1921 as American attempts to curb Japan's aggressive expansion in the Far East were unsuccessful. A Japanese-American naval race seemed in the offing, and there were predictions of eventual open warfare between Japan and the United States.³³ Russia and China were weakened by internal revolutions among other things.

If American-Japanese relations were tense by 1921, Anglo-American relations were hardly harmonious. The war-time partnership had not obliterated the pre-war conflict over neutral rights, and the American threat to the traditional British position of naval supremacy aggravated British feelings. From the American viewpoint, the continuing existence of an Anglo-Japanese Alliance was a source of irritation, worsened by the disappearance of the German fleet as a threat to Britain's European position.

President Wilson's alternative to a League of Nations, military and naval expansion, would have meant great cost to the American taxpayer, and implicitly great cost to traditional American liberties. To the Republican administration the idea of America's active participation in the League was dead. The other alternative, as Wilson had defined it, seemed unpleasant, but Harding's administration seemed headed in that direction until it was side-tracked by a powerful move in Congress

32. For documents illustrating the various methods and concepts used in the quest for security by the various European nations, see J.W. Wheeler-Bennett and F.E. Langermann, Information on the Problem of Security, 1917-1926, (London: Geo. Allen and Unwin, 1927).

33. See the Sprouts, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, pp. 85-99.

to try a third course, the mutual security arrangement whereby America yielded almost none of her independence of action, but agreed to halt the expensive competition in naval armaments.

Thus the Washington Conference was convened in the fall of 1921 to formulate the alternatives to competitive armaments or a world collective security organization. As the conference progressed it was divulged what the various participating nations were willing to publicly state and agree were their basic requirements for territorial security.

The lengthy and occasionally bitter debates and negotiations of the Washington Conference revealed, directly and implicitly, many of the "power aspirations" of the participating powers.³⁴ The most widely publicized result of the conference was a partial limitation of naval armaments. Specifically, the principal world naval powers agreed to a naval "holiday" and a replacement program designed to produce within ten years a three-power ratio of 5:5:3 in battleship and aircraft carrier tonnage. No limitation was placed upon the number of cruisers, although the size and armament were limited. No limitation whatever was placed upon the number of auxiliary ships, including submarines and other types of vessels. The actual limitation of naval forces was much less than many had hoped, but such as was agreed to was to be hailed by large sections of the press and many in Congress as a great achievement.³⁵

Perhaps even more significant than the five-power agreement on naval limitation, as indicators of American concepts of security, were other treaties agreed upon at the Washington Conference, which

34. For a detailed account of the Washington Conference, see ibid., pp. 145 ff.

35. For a detailed summary of reactions to conference results, see Hoag, op. cit., pp. 142 ff.

attempted to define zones of naval power in order to preserve the status quo in those areas where there could be agreement on such. This definition, in effect of zones of naval influence in the Pacific, was supplemented by mutual assurance pacts, promising non-aggression and respect for the status quo, or traditional interests. One of these agreements was the Four-Power Treaty which abrogated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and in which the United States, Great Britain, France and Japan concurred in mutual respect for rights in the Pacific and agreed to refer future disputes to a joint conference. There was also a part of the treaty which, much to the consternation of isolationist members of the Senate, might have been interpreted to suggest cooperative armed action in case of a threat to their interests by an outside power.³⁶

Another important result of the conference was the Nine-Power Treaty on China, in which the signatories agreed to respect the "sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial and administrative integrity of China."³⁷ By this reaffirmation of the "Open Door" policy in China, the United States hoped to bind Japan to the pledges contained in the Nine-Power agreement, and thus preserve the status quo, in cooperation with other nations, but without having to provide the military and naval forces to guarantee its preservation.

A Republican leadership which had bitterly and successfully fought Wilson's League of Nations proposal, now was found drafting, sponsoring, and advocating the adoption of measures which by strict interpretation, could hardly be termed "isolationist."

36. Foreign Relations, 1922, I, 35 ff.

37. Foreign Relations, 1922, I, 278. For full text of the Nine-Power Treaty on China, see ibid., I, 276-281.

In recommending to the Senate the results of the work of Secretary of State Hughes and others at the Washington Conference, the administration was again rejecting the advice of its professional naval leaders.³⁸ Naval leaders were not only unhappy about the limitations imposed upon battle fleets, but expressed little faith in the "parchment peace" guaranteed by the signatories. America's promise also to limit fortifications of her Pacific island possessions likewise met with the consternation of naval opinion.³⁹

Officials of the administration as well as leaders in Congress had, by 1922, clearly rejected the "idealism" of former President Wilson; but they had also rejected the "realism" of most of the professional military and naval leaders. This was done, as was stated in the report and recommendations of Washington Conference delegates, in order to create the "conditions in which peaceful security will take the place of competitive preparation for war."⁴⁰ The principal negotiators proudly announced to Congress that they had

terminated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and substituted friendly conference in place of war as the first reaction from any controversies which might arise in the region of the Pacific; it would not have been possible except as part of a plan including a limitation and a reduction of naval armaments, but that limitation and reduction would not have been possible without the new relations established by the Four Power Treaty or something equivalent to it. 41

In considering action on the results of the Washington Conference the Senate focused its attention upon the Four-Power Treaty,

38. For a summary of reactions of naval leaders to the results of the conference, see the Sprouts, op. cit., pp. 262 ff; see also Hoag, op. cit., pp. 163 ff; and Capt. D.W. Knox, The Eclipse of American Sea Power, (New York: Army and Navy Journal, Inc., 1922).

39. Idem.

40. U S. Congress, Senate, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, Document No. 126, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 866.

41. Idem.

to which there was the most widespread opposition. To many Senators, including Borah, who had played a major role in the calling of the Washington Conference, this particular treaty seemed far too much like a distasteful "entangling alliance," and it was opposed on such general grounds. But Harding had cleverly included leading Senators from both the majority and minority parties as chief delegates, virtually assuring passage.⁴²

The Four-Power Treaty was undoubtedly the key treaty of those drawn up by the Washington Conference. Those Senators opposed in general to the work of the conference were aware that the Four-Power Treaty was the weakest point of attack, because this treaty could be labeled with the dreaded word "alliance." The proponents of the treaty sensed this and included a perhaps inevitable reservation denying that the treaty was, in fact, an alliance, nor was the United States committed or obligated to armed force. Even so, the Four-Power Treaty was approved by the Senate with only a few votes to spare, whereas the amendment erasing the suggestion of alliance was accepted by a vote of ninety-one to two.⁴³

Senator ~~Samuel~~ Shortridge expressed a sentiment perhaps widely held by the public when he rejoiced, "I love to think that the very angels sang in joy over the work in that conference."⁴⁴ There was great popular support for the impression generated by publicity about

42. Chief delegates were Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, Elihu Root, and Senators Henry Cabot Lodge and Oscar Underwood.

43. Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., LXII, 4496. For an analysis of the Senate debate on the Washington Conference treaties, see J. Chal Vinson, "The Parchment Peace," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (September, 1952), 303-314; D.F. Fleming, The United States and World Organization, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 86 ff; the Sprouts, op. cit., pp. 270 ff; and Congressional Record, LXII passim.

44. Congressional Record, LXII, 4238.

the conference that the nation was now freed from the costly and risky armaments race, while at the same time its interests were insured by mutual agreements, not alliances, with other nations.⁴⁵ Not only was the United States freed from a burdensome armaments race with Great Britain and Japan, it was felt, but costly fortifications of Pacific islands were rendered unnecessary by the Washington treaties. It was apparently widely believed that "public opinion and moral force had supplanted battleships and shore batteries as the bulwark of the nation's policy."⁴⁶ These sentiments, as expressed in the Senate debates over the treaties and in press reaction to the results of the conference, were significant in the development of new conceptions of wars to achieve national security at bargain rates during this period.

In the course of the Senate debate, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge had significantly proclaimed: "The Marshall Islands, I think, contain nothing. They are very trivial islands." As for Guam, "we have never fortified it, and nobody would vote to spend money in fortifying it." And, of fortifying the Philippine Islands, he said, "It would cost hundreds of millions of dollars . . . and probably take half a century to do it."⁴⁷

These comments were significant indices in the trend toward new concepts of national security which were to influence the decisions regarding military air power in the spring of 1926. These actions of

45. See, for example, Hoag, op. cit., pp. 142 ff for a summary of press opinion.

46. Vinson, op. cit., p. 308.

47. Congressional Record, LXII, 3551, 3682-83.

1922 perhaps represented a faith in international agreements which the idealistic Woodrow Wilson might have scorned. But such actions had public appeal, and the Congress was soon to demand further reduction of spending on armies and navies, to the further disturbance of professional military leaders. Although it had been distasteful to naval leaders to see the limitations set upon battleships, they were perhaps encouraged to see that official American policy was, in fact, based upon their cherished doctrine of battle fleet supremacy. The mutual security arrangements made for the western Pacific and elsewhere were influenced by the Mahan doctrine of command of the sea by means of battle fleet supremacy. The navies of the United States, Japan and Great Britain were delimited in their spheres of possible action under the ratio agreed to. These decisions were directly influenced by traditional naval doctrine, and showed no direct effect of the sinking of the German battleship Ostfriesland off the Virginia Capes in July, 1921, by the forces of Brigadier General William Mitchell.

There was discussion of the limitation of military aircraft at the Washington Conference, and a technical subcommittee was appointed to study the possibilities. But it was found impossible to separate a discussion of aircraft from consideration of land army disarmament, and this being out of the question, particularly because of British-French tensions, the matter got nowhere. The American delegation officially reported to the President on this question of aircraft:

It was found to be impracticable to adopt rules for the limitation of aircraft in number, size, or character, in view of the fact that such rules would be of little or no value unless the production of commercial aircraft were similarly restricted. It was deemed to be inadvisable thus to hamper the development of a facility which could not fail to be important in the progress of civilization. 48

48. Senate Document No. 126, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, p. 818. For report of aircraft subcommittee and discussion, see ibid., pp. 385 ff and 413 ff.

However, a commission was established to consider formulation of the rules of aerial warfare, with the **idea** of restricting the use of military aircraft, especially bombing, to strictly "military" targets.⁴⁹

Thus, to achieve security of her international interests, American political leaders in 1922 had placed their faith partially in the good word of their leading competitors in the world. Pledges had been given, and signatures written, that were to insure the security of the status quo. These pledges were underwritten by the delimitation of naval spheres of action in accord with the doctrine of "command of the sea" through battleship supremacy. Aircraft carriers had been moderately limited, but the number of military aircraft and submarines not at all. The sometimes conflicting forces of world-wide economic interests and responsibilities and a steadily increasing nationalistic and anti-foreign domestic sentiment had worked upon policy makers by 1922 to produce the middle way between international collective security and a military state. This middle way was the acceptance of the concept of partial naval armament limitation and the pledges of world rivals to limit their naval forces and thereby to control their aggressive aspirations. These agreements took no direct notice of the **rapidly** developing capabilities of aircraft.

The preservation of national security through limiting armaments was a concept which seemed almost to increase in popularity in inverse proportion to the rising tide of anti-foreignism and disillusionment with international affairs. Following the Washington Conference and the approval of its treaties by the Senate in 1922, naval leaders were to experience frustration time and again in maintaining naval strength

49. See ibid., pp. 32 ff.

even in keeping with the Washington Treaty provisions. Neither Army nor Navy leaders were successful in maintaining their forces up to what they had considered the minimum consistent with safety to the nation's interests, much less their authorized minimum strength.

Illustrative of the pressure for economy and preoccupation with domestic affairs was the fact that President Harding in one of **the** last few speeches before his death felt called upon to remind the nation of a need for a strong Navy. He told a Seattle, Washington, audience:

. . . the Navy is our first line of defense. It is the armed shield-bearer upon which we depend to ward off war which we mean in our hearts never to provoke. Perhaps the day may come . . . when nations will employ no armed forces. Until such a day does come, we shall find our assurance in our Navy of first rank. Let us hope our Congress, with the cordial sanction of the American people, will continue that first rank. . . . I believe our clear duty to ourselves is to maintain the equality provided in that maximum until a new baptism of international conscience shall prescribe joint action toward reduction or complete abolishment. 50

Explaining the mission of the Navy, Harding went on to say:

We owe it to ourselves to understand that the Navy is rather more than a mere instrumentality of warfare. It is the right arm of the Department of State, seeing to the enforcement of its righteous pronouncements.

He added to this rather blunt pronouncement of the Navy as an instrument of national policy a statement which could hardly be classed as isolationist! "The Navy has our colors afloat today almost everywhere on the seven seas . . . to emphasize our confidence in ourselves and our sense of obligation at home."⁵¹

50. Warren G. Harding, Speeches and Addresses, loc. cit., July 27, 1923, p. 363.

51. Idem.

There was obviously concern among some civilian and military leaders less the idea of armament limitation become too popular. The annual reports of the Secretaries of War and the Navy carried the admonition in 1923 and succeeding years that expenditures for national defense were below the minimum needs of the Army and Navy.⁵² Looking back on the period, James W. Wadsworth, then chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, observed that following the war and the peace conference,

the attention of the people of the United States and to a large extent of Congress . . . was diverted completely from further consideration of military affairs. . . . the attitude of the American people with respect to the continued maintenance of the national defense became one of indifference. 53

There were other forces at work in the early 1920s in addition to the preoccupation with economy and efficiency which also significantly affected America's outlook on world affairs and consequently the defense organization of the nation. The post-war world outlook of the United States was influenced increasingly by revised estimates of the war guilt of Germany. The growing cynicism, particularly about Europe, was fostered by the publications and disclosures of secret diplomatic documents and agreements involving our war-time allies. A revisionist theory of war guilt and the causes of the war gained in popularity, and revisionism was adopted by a number of influential American historians. This revisionism was of course only one of the causes of an increase in nationalistic

52. See Annual Reports, Secretary of War, Secretary of the Navy, 1923, 1924, 1925.

53. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on Post-War Military Policy, Hearings, 78th Cong., 2nd Sess., Part I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), pp. 316-317.

sentiment in the post-war years. Yet undoubtedly it contributed much, when coupled with the reluctance of most of our former allies to repay huge war debts, to the wave of anti-foreignism which was an important political factor in the 1920s, and which affected both domestic and foreign policy.⁵⁴ This post-war phenomenon of disillusionment was not found solely in the camp of Republican conservatism, for "The 'liberal' journals of opinion almost always used the war-guilt question to preach isolation."⁵⁵

In a significant action in the Senate, Senator Robert L. Owen, Democrat, of Oklahoma, delivered in December, 1923, a lengthy speech on the "international intrigues" which had caused the war, and inserted in the Congressional Record detailed documents, revisionist articles, and excerpts from books showing that England, France, Russia and others shared the guilt for the war with Germany. Senator Owen did not question the wisdom of America's having entered the war, but complained bitterly that "America was not informed with regard to the secret intrigues of Europe, nor of its commercialized imperialistic aims." Owen warned, "It is for American statesmen to consider now how far these secret forces are in control of the British and French Governments."⁵⁶

Disillusioned "liberals" and "progressives" were to join forces with economy-minded Harding and Coolidge Republican conservatives to produce a rising tide of opposition in Congress to

54. For an analysis of the historiography of post-war revisionism, see Selig Adler, "The War-Guilt Question and American Disillusionment, 1918-1928," Journal of Modern History, XXIII (March, 1951), 1-28.

55. Ibid., p. 28.

56. Congressional Record, 68th Cong., 1st Sess., LXV (December 18, 1923), 375. For full text see pp. 355-399.

"excessive" expenditures on military armaments, and to a sweeping distrust of entanglement in the "power politics" and "imperialism" of the deceitful, greedy, and chauvinistic Europeans.⁵⁷

By 1923 the influential and iconoclastic William Allen White, writing from the heart of Kansas, was expressing also his disillusionment when he stated:

Five years ago if anyone had said that the war was merely a slaughter to satisfy the national ambitions of the winner, that it was a war to let France get even with Germany, he would have been shot for a traitor. To have said that the war was not a war to end war, would have put the man who said it in jail.

Yet here is a world bled white by war and armed or arming to the teeth for more war.

What a ghastly joke was all our fine idealism.⁵⁸

Doubts expressed in 1923 had become firm convictions with White on Armistice Day in 1926, when he wrote:

We know today that the blame for the war cannot be entirely on Germany. . . . the policy of super-militarism, hyper-patriotism and all the tommy rot that goes with high-powered arrogant military preparedness made the war inevitable. . . . We only know that too much gun-toting, too many big navies and too many big armies caused the last war, and the same reasons for building those navies and enlisting those armies are now being given by the same kind of men who built the navies and enlisted the armies and threatened the world twenty years ago. . . . Are we going to keep listening to the same crowd now? 59

57. For an analysis of the opinion of "liberals" in this period, see Eric Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), pp. 262-319; also Karl Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1948), pp. 231 ff; Preston W. Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1928, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), pp. 287 ff.

58. William Allen White, editorial on November 14, 1923, reprinted in Forty Years on Main Street, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1937), pp. 181-182.

59. Ibid., pp. 182-183.

These thoughts had been developing steadily in the period under consideration, and by 1926 the spirit of pacifism, for a variety of reasons, was rampant. This undoubtedly was to affect decisions on our military aviation policy.

If Harding's sudden death and the succession of Calvin Coolidge to the Presidency had any marked effect upon the nation's outlook on world affairs and national defense policies, it was because even more of the national leadership tended to gravitate toward the Congress. "President Coolidge felt even less responsibility for leadership than his immediate predecessor."⁶⁰ The time came when Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth could take the floor in opposition to President Coolidge's naval program and proclaim:

I agree with you as to the efficiency of the Bureau of the Budget and I believe in following them whenever I can. But, mind you, the Bureau of the Budget is not responsible to the people of the United States, and we are. 61

Coolidge's role was to be that of a strict overseer of the Public Treasury and the interests of the American "tax-payer." He considered a conservative, budget-balanced, debtless economy as the first line of defense, and if an Army and Navy adequate to the world interests of the United States could not be fitted into a small budget, then his lieutenants must look to further disarmament arrangements.

The President chose the occasion of an address to an annual Associated Press conference in April, 1924, to indicate a new, if somewhat indefinite, intention of seeking further international armament limitations. "The Washington Conference did a great deal to restore harmony and good will among the nations," said the

60. Binkley, op. cit., p. 243.

61. Quoted in Binkley, op. cit., p. 247.

President. If a clear and definite settlement to the German reparations problem could be achieved, he asserted, "I should favor calling a similar conference to achieve such [further] limitations of armaments."⁶² But, he cautioned, whatever new international agreements are reached, "Our first duty is to ourselves. American standards must be maintained, American institutions must be preserved." The President seemed, in general, very agreeable to allowing the Congress to interpret freely exactly what these "standards" and "institutions" were to mean. Over his protest, Congress added to the Immigration Bill of 1924 a clause excluding entirely Japanese persons, in an outbreak of anti-Oriental sentiment which was to have serious repercussions in the Far East. Coolidge also favored United States membership in the Permanent Court of International Justice. Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee disregarded his suggestion and reported a compromise which Coolidge declared was "Unworthy of America."⁶³

As the national political conventions of 1924 approached, the Undersecretary of State recorded in his diary:

. . . the feeling of hostility towards us all through Japan is apparently increasing and while the Japanese Government expresses its intention of avoiding all disorders, it does not appear to be taking any definite steps to prevent them. Three suicides have occurred as protests against the American Exclusion Act, and one of those persons has been given a public funeral. 64

62. Calvin Coolidge, "New Call for Disarming," April 22, 1924, printed as Senate Document No. 94, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), p. 9.

63. Claude M. Fuess, Calvin Coolidge, The Man from Vermont, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1940), pp. 341-342.

64. Joseph C. Grew, op. cit., diary entry, June 10, 1924, p. 622.

General Mitchell was advised against a proposed visit to Japan and Korea in the spring of 1924 by the American Embassy in Tokyo, because it would have been "misconstrued and looked upon with grave suspicion by the Japanese."⁶⁵ A few days later, Grew recorded that "a strictly confidential telegram from Ambassador Herrick in France indicates that there is much talk in France regarding Japanese preparations for ultimate war with us."⁶⁶ By this time there was also widespread anti-American sentiment among our former Allies in Europe as a consequence of America's tight-fisted insistence upon at least partial repayment of war debts, and the State Department's influence curtailing business loans in recalcitrant debtor nations. America prepared to launch one of its favorite spectacles, the quadriennial presidential election campaign, in the midst of a growing and pervasive feeling of anti-foreignism and super-nationalism.

65. Telegram from American Embassy, Tokyo to Mitchell, May 16, 1924, in The General William Mitchell Papers, Library of Congress. Hereafter cited as Mitchell Papers.

66. Grew, op. cit., diary entry, June 17, 1924, p. 624.

CHAPTER VI

PARTY POLITICS AND NATIONAL SECURITY

"We are not identified with any Old World interests," said President Coolidge in his Inaugural Address in 1925. World peace could be best served and promoted, the President observed, "by maintaining our position of political detachment and independence."¹

The presidential election of 1924 had seemed to have produced a clear mandate for these sentiments. A brief survey of the political party stands on national security will reveal the most widely held beliefs regarding America's proper role in the world.

In the keynote address at the 1924 Democratic National Convention in New York, Senator Pat Harrison proclaimed:

The Democratic Party offers no apology for its foreign policy. When the Woodrow Wilson plan for world adjustment was wrecked by the selfish and jealous hands of reactionary Republican leadership, world hope for peace was shattered and European rehabilitation indefinitely deferred. The tragedy is they wrecked our plan and offered nothing instead. 2

But this was keynote oratory and the Democratic Party was by no means united in continued support of Wilson's League. The issue of support for the League was one of the bitter platform drafting fights in the convention. As suggested above, disillusionment and cynicism about world affairs had pervaded the most liberal and progressive circles.

1. March 4, 1925, reprinted in Calvin Coolidge, Foundations of the Republic, Speeches and Addresses, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 199.

2. Democratic National Committee, Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1924, Official Report (Indianapolis, 1924), p. 20.

Among many progressives, "A shrug of hopelessness usually greeted talk of a world organization that would be anything more than a facade for greed and chauvinisms."³ But the Democratic Party was trapped in its own recent history as far as the League issue was concerned, and the outcome of the platform-drafting struggles was a compromise. The party platform strongly endorsed the League in principle, but the question of whether the United States was to become a member would be left to a special popular referendum. The party was unwilling to make the political election itself a referendum on this issue as was done in 1920.

If the Democratic Party vacillated on the League question, they took a forthright stand on the question of armament reduction. "We demand a strict and sweeping reduction of armaments by land and sea, so that there shall be no competitive military program or naval building." But until international agreements for this purpose had been made, the party supported an Army and Navy "adequate for our national safety."⁴ Prompted perhaps by the popular belief that wars were caused by sinister "interests" the party platform also contained a provision for a war referendum, "except in case of actual or threatened attack." The platform further stated:

Those who must furnish the blood and bear the burdens imposed by war should, whenever possible, be consulted before this supreme sacrifice is required of them. War is a relic of barbarism, and it is justifiable only as a measure of defense. 5

The Democrats also called for tax reduction and supported the "ideal" of the World Court.

3. Goldman, op. cit., p. 282.

4. Democratic National Committee, Democratic Campaign Book, (Washington, 1924), p. 39.

5. Idem.

In his speech of acceptance at Clarksburg, West Virginia, Democratic presidential candidate John W. Davis scoffed at the Republican administration's practice of sending "unofficial observers" to participate in certain activities of the League of Nations. He characterized this as "bootlegging participation." Davis asserted, "We must face the humiliating fact that we have a government that does not dare to speak its mind beyond the three mile limit."⁶

While political party platforms are usually designed to appeal to the aspirations of as many citizens as possible, and thus tend to promise as much as possible on as many sides of the political fence as possible, the platform planks do reveal, at least, what each party believed was a popular stand to take on the issues of national defense and world affairs. And the two parties, in 1924, even if they claimed no fundamental differences on these issues, at least differed in the placing of emphasis. It is significant, however, that both parties scrambled to take credit for the Washington Disarmament Conference. Senator Pat Harrison had asserted to the Democratic Convention:

The Disarmament Conference was held, not because of the Republican Administration but in spite of the Republican Administration. It was first suggested by a Democrat. 7

Republicans were also eager to express praise for the concept of disarmament, and pride in the accomplishments of the Washington Conference under their administration. Calvin Coolidge, in his speech

6. Ibid., p. 114.

7. Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1924, p. 12.

of acceptance, could say of the Washington Naval Conference, "It was sublime."⁸ Speaking of the conference, Coolidge added,

It produced the one effective agreement among the great powers in all the history of civilization for relieving the people of the earth from the enormous burden of maintaining naval armaments. I do not believe any conference did more to promote the peace of the world. I am perfectly sure that none ever did so much to reduce the cost of government. 9

And yet in the Republican Party platform, the emphasis, under the heading of national defense, was in contrast to the Democratic demand for a "sweeping reduction of armaments by land and sea." The national defense plank stressed the need for maintaining current military strength.

There must be no further weakening of our regular Army. . . . We pledge ourselves to round out and maintain the Navy to the full strength provided the United States by the letter and spirit of the Limitation of Armament Conference. 10

And in his speech of acceptance, Coolidge also said:

I am in favor of national defense, not merely as an abstract state of mind, but as a concrete mode of action. I favor not merely talking about it, but doing something about it. I do not want the safety of my country imperiled in its domestic or foreign relations by any failure to be ready to preserve order or repel attack. But I propose to work for voluntary observance of law and mutual covenants of peace. 11

Coolidge was speaking as head of a government and as one responsible for the security of the nation, and not as a member of a party out of power seeking power through popular appeals. Herein lies, perhaps, the

8. August 14, 1924, Washington, D.C., reprinted in Republican National Committee, Republican Campaign Text-book, (Chicago, 1924), p. 23.

9. Idem.

10. Ibid., pp. 89-90.

11. Ibid., p. 33.

real reason for the difference in approach to this subject by the two major parties.

A foreign policy of the "middle way" was the one proclaimed in the Republican Campaign Text-book of 1924:

The determinative principles of our foreign policy are those of independence and cooperation. Independence - that does not mean and never has meant isolation. Cooperation - that does not mean and never has meant alliances or political entanglements. There is a just middle course of national safety, of national honor, of national interest, of national duty. It is the course of an appropriate cooperation, congenial to our traditions and institutions. 12

Republican campaign strategists were willing to have what was called the "whole theory of national defense as applied by the Harding-Coolidge Administration" be summed up in a statement of Secretary of the Navy Wilbur, whose speech in Cincinnati, Ohio on June 25, 1924, was excerpted in the campaign text-book. Said Wilbur:

We have a right to yield territory, but we have no right to surrender the liberties of the inhabitants of that territory to protect our nation. So long as there are thieves and murderers in the world we cannot disband our police force, and so long as such men may be dominant in some strong government, indeed, so long as men are selfish enough to begin war, we must be prepared for war and willing to make war to resist aggression. 13

These words may have been addressed as much to the economy-minded Congress as they were to the voters or to some potentially aggressive foreign nation.

Another factor in the presidential campaign of 1924 was the Progressive Movement, led by Senators Bob LaFollette and Burton K.

12. Ibid., p. 157.

13. Ibid., p. 363

Wheeler, which symptomized the thinking of important sections of the nation on foreign policy and national security.¹⁴ In the announcement of his candidacy, LaFollette declared that the "ill-gotten surplus capital acquired by exploiting the resources and the people of our country begets the imperialism which hunts down and exploits the natural resources and the people of foreign countries, erects huge armaments for the protection of its investments, breeds international strife in the markets of the world, and inevitably leads to war."¹⁵

The Progressive Party platform denounced "the mercenary system of foreign policy under recent administrations in the interests of financial imperialists, oil monopolists and international bankers, which has at times degraded our State Department from its high service as a strong and kindly intermediary of defenseless governments to a trading outpost for those interests and concession seekers engaged in the exploitation of weaker nations." It favored "an active foreign policy to bring about a revision of the Versailles treaty in accordance with the terms of the armistice, and to promote firm treaty agreements with all nations to outlaw wars, to abolish conscription, drastically reduce land, air, and naval armaments, and guarantee public referendums on peace and war."¹⁶

No mention was made of the League of Nations, and the only interest expressed in treaties or alliances was to the end of outlawing

14. For an account of the Progressive Movement, see Kenneth C. McKay, The Progressive Movement of 1924, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947). For a reinterpretation of "isolationism," see Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), pp. 129-157.

15. La Follette-Wheeler Campaign Headquarters, The Facts, Campaign Text-book, (Chicago, 1924), pp. 34-35.

16. Ibid., p. 116.

war and military conscription, and drastically reducing armaments. The nation's security and prevention of war could not be entrusted to the Democrats or Republicans, said the Progressives, as they were both the tools of Standard Oil, J.P. Morgan, and other "International Bankers."

At the risk of over-generalization, it can be said that the American electorate in the fall of 1924 was offered three ill-defined alternatives to national security. The Democrats implicitly endorsed the principle of the League of Nations - international collective security arrangements under which armaments could be reduced through a pooling of armed forces - although sensing a contrary public sentiment, they did not campaign on the issue of immediate membership in the League. The Republican Party offered what it called the "middle course," calling for membership in the World Court, and "agreements among nations" to preserve peace, but nothing which would sound remotely like an alliance or Wilson's basic concept of a collective security organization. Agreements could be reached to limit armaments without endangering the sacred sovereignty of the nation. The Progressives offered, in effect, isolation. No mention was made of the League, but a firm conviction was expressed that war must be outlawed, and armaments drastically reduced. The Progressives, in their platform, specifically mentioned reduction of air armaments, in addition to land and sea. The Republicans had included land forces, the use of submarines, and poison gas in their recommendation, with no mention of aircraft; nor had the Democrats made specific mention of military aircraft in discussing disarmament.

These were the major provisions of the political parties regarding foreign policy and national security in 1924, but it seems unlikely that these were major issues in the campaign. Of those who

voted, and only 51.1 per cent turned out for the election, a sizeable majority seemed preoccupied in enjoying "Coolidge prosperity" or with domestic problems. Coolidge won an overwhelming victory in the election, receiving far more votes than Davis and LaFollette combined.¹⁷ The election sent to the 69th Congress healthy Republican majorities.¹⁸

As Secretary of State Hughes had announced to the American Bar Association in 1923, "Our attitude is one of independence, not of isolation."¹⁹ Hughes later stated, "To a peace-loving democracy, what could be more agreeable than reasonable security under an agreement which halts a wasteful competition in armament."²⁰ Whatever actions taken by the administration would be designed so as not to hamper the nation's independence of action in the world, but there were strong pressures for further reducing the cost of armaments in the United States. Whatever was to be done along this line, however, was to be accomplished through international conferences and mutual agreements. The election of 1924 further convinced Republican leaders that the League, as a means of national security, was unpopular, although certain aspects of Wilson's idealism seem to have permeated American thinking, and there seemed to be a tinge of guilt-consciousness on the part of some Republicans, including the

17. Coolidge received 15,275,003 popular and 382 electoral votes; Davis, 8,385,386 and 136; LaFollette, 4,826,471 and 13. LaFollette's strength was mostly west of the Mississippi; Davis' main strength was in the traditionally solid south. See Congressional Directory, 1925.

18. 55 Republicans, 40 Democrats, and 1 Farmer-Laborite in the Senate; 264 Republicans, 148 Democrats and 1 Socialist in the House.

19. Charles Evans Hughes, "Observations on the Monroe Doctrine," Minneapolis, Minn., August 30, 1923, Address before 56th Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association, Dept. of State, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923).

20. Hughes, The Pathways of Peace, Addresses, 1921-1925 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1925), pp. 44-45.

Secretary of State.²¹ Soon after the election, however, the Under-secretary of State recorded in his diary:

. . . the election has shown without the slightest doubt that the majority of the American people are against our joining it [the League] or getting mixed up in any way in European political affairs. [Secretary of State Hughes] said that the statements in his various campaign speeches along those lines had evoked greater applause than any other topic. . . . it is perfectly clear that the mandate of the people is unfavorable to any closer relations with the League than we have at present. 22

Yet while desiring to maintain a position of "political detachment and independence" in world affairs, the Republican administration was keenly interested in pursuing the prospect of further agreements for the limitation of armaments and other international techniques which would further guarantee the nation's security while easing the burden on the national treasury.

21. For the circumstances surrounding Hughes' unsuccessful attempts at a more internationalist foreign policy, see Merlo J. Pusey, op. cit., II, 431-437.

22. Grew, op. cit., November 17, 1924, p. 643.

CHAPTER VII

SOME FURTHER CONCEPTS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

The advent of military aircraft, and their potentialities as weapons of war, however debatable, had diminished the importance of some of the bulwarks of national defense such as protective geographic features of various world nations. "No instrumentality in the long history of warfare has exerted so revolutionary an influence upon strategy and politics as the military airplane."¹ Although the significance of aircraft development upon military and naval doctrines was under heavy debate in the post-war years, there was realization of the fact that aircraft had created for the world of nations new and complex problems of national security. Negotiations, therefore, regarding further restrictions of the use of this new weapon of destruction had been proposed.

Such international negotiations were being conducted in 1923, 1924, and 1925, by a commission which had been set in motion in the closing days of the Washington Naval Conference and concerned in part the use of military aircraft in warfare.

The United States was represented on the International Commission for the Revision of the Rules of Warfare by John Bassett Moore, a member of the World Court at The Hague.² Later a second delegate, Albert H. Washburn, was named. Also on the commission were delegates representing Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan.

1. Edward Meade Earle, "Influence of Air Power on History," Yale Review, XXXV (June, 1946), 579.

2. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923, I, 47 ff.

One of the questions before the commission was whether existing international law adequately covered new "methods of attack and defense," including aircraft.³ International peace conferences at The Hague in 1899 and 1907 had issued certain declarations dealing with aerial bombardment, but no changes in this respect had been made, at least in the substance of international law, since the 1907 Hague declarations. In The Hague Declaration of 1899 it was stated: "The contracting parties agree to prohibit, for a term of five years, the launching of projectiles and explosives from balloons, or by other new methods of similar nature."⁴ This declaration was signed by twenty-six nations, including the United States, France, Germany, Italy and Russia, and ratified by all of the twenty-six except Russia.

In 1907 it was declared at the Hague International Peace Conference that "The contracting powers agree to prohibit, for a period extending to the close of the Third Peace Conference, the discharge of projectiles or explosives from balloons or by other new methods of a similar nature."⁵ This declaration was signed and ratified by fifteen nations, including Great Britain, and the United States, but not Germany, France, or Russia.

The commission that grew out of a resolution at the Washington Conference went to work anew in the fall of 1922 on this question. Advisory rules concerning the use of aircraft were drafted in the United States in both the War and Navy Departments, and transmitted

3. Ibid., p. 47.

4. Hague Declaration of 1899, in Hague International Peace Conference, 1899, 1907, Art. IV, Section 1, Pamphlet No. 7 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1915), p. 1.

5. Idem.

to the commission through the Secretary of State.⁶ The War Department suggested in its draft that "Bombardment by aircraft for the purpose of injuring noncombatants or of destroying or damaging private property not of a military character . . . or of terrorizing the civilian population is forbidden."⁷ This proposal definitely rejected some of the theories incubating among the air radicals regarding the use of strategic bombing, and indicated that the idea of "total war" had gained no official acceptance in the highest War Department circles. Bombardment of "combat areas" only was to be permitted under the rules of war suggested by the War Department. The term "combat area" was rather strictly defined to include the land area "within the actual range of such artillery of the bombarding belligerent as accompany its mobile land forces . . . the territorial waters contiguous to said area and within the range aforesaid, and . . . the railways, highways, and reasonably expected routes of march or of advance of the combatant forces of the enemy to a distance of one hundred miles from the military lines of such enemy."⁸ The War Department thus suggested the limitation of bombardment by aircraft to rigidly defined targets, and rejected the concept of strategic warfare against the morale and industrial resources of an enemy.⁹

The Navy Department's proposals regarding bombing were, in general, similar to those of the War Department, although stated more concisely. The Navy proposed, in part, that the "bombardment by aircraft of cities, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings is forbidden." Also,

6. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923, I, 51 ff.

7. Ibid., p. 56.

8. Idem.

9. "Rule of Warfare as Proposed by the War Department," November 13, 1922, Foreign Relations, 1923, I, 52 ff.

The bombardment by aircraft of enemy forces, communication and transportation centers, lines of communication and transportation, military plants and factories used for the manufacture of war material wherever situated is not prohibited. 10

The international commission held thirty plenary sessions from December 11, 1922 to February 19, 1923 in The Hague, and issued a report on February 26, 1923, having considered the question of the use of both radio and aircraft in warfare.¹¹

On the question of bombardment the commission had reached the agreement that "Aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorising the civilian population, of destroying or damaging private property not of military character, or of injuring non-combatants is prohibited." The commission did not hesitate to define what was of "military character." Bombardment was to be considered legal only if directed at the following objectives: "military forces; military works; military establishments or depots; factories constituting important and well-known centres engaged in the manufacture of arms, ammunition or distinctively military supplies; lines of communication or transportation used for military purposes." In cases where these specified objects could not be bombed without indiscriminate harm to civilians in the area, the aircraft "must abstain from bombardment." Other rules regarding the use of aircraft in war were spelled out in detail and recommended to the participating nations.¹²

10. Ibid., p. 62. For the Navy's "Proposed Aircraft Rules," see ibid., pp. 60 ff.

11. For general report, see Foreign Relations, 1923, I, 67 ff.

12. Ibid., p. 77.

Both the Secretaries of War and the Navy notified the Secretary of State that the draft of the code as submitted by the commission was "in general accord" with the views of their departments. Both added that the proposed rules were acceptable insofar as such rules could be laid down at that time.¹³ There was, however, in the letter of the Secretary of the Navy, a note of skepticism. He appeared concerned lest "one or more of the Powers represented . . . be willing to permit the work of the Commission to be forgotten." But whether or not the rules, as drafted, were ever embodied into a treaty, Secretary Denby expressed the belief that they would be at least of some value "for guidance in the use of new implements of warfare."¹⁴

This attempt by the United States to achieve even partial collective security by restricting the use of a new and devastating weapon of war was to end in failure. European rivalries and conflicting concepts of national security, as well as differences of opinion as to the effects of the new weapons upon these concepts, were to block common agreement at this time on the use of military aircraft.

In January, 1924, Secretary Hughes had communicated instructions to his ambassadors in Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan and to the Minister in the Netherlands to inform those states that the United States was prepared to sign the convention as proposed by the commission.¹⁵ In April, 1924, Japan indicated her willingness to adopt the rules relating to aerial warfare and use of radio in wartime.¹⁶ But the Italian and Netherlands governments wished further study and revision of the rules.¹⁷ After much delay,

13. Ibid., pp. 87-89.

14. Ibid., p. 88.

15. Foreign Relations, 1925, I, 93-95.

16. Ibid., pp. 95-96.

17. Ibid., pp. 97-104.

the French government also replied in a fashion suggesting further revision of the rules.¹⁸ The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edouard Herriot, tartly suggested that if the United States should ratify the Air Convention of 1919 much could be accomplished thereby along these lines.¹⁹

Finally, the impossibility of obtaining agreement to these rules of aerial warfare became certain when the British government replied that, "while warmly appreciating the friendly and humanitarian motives which have prompted these proposals," the British government had "decided to await further international discussion on this question before formulating their considered views on the Report of the Hague Commission."²⁰ With this, the United States could record as a "failure" the efforts to secure the adoption of the proposed rules, so that in the mid-1920s the attempts to find security from aerial warfare in international law, at the initiative of the United States, superficial though these efforts may have been, foundered on the rocks of European unrest, instability and rivalries.

In December of 1925 President Coolidge suggested to Congress "further international contracts for the limitation of armaments." But, he advised, "It seems clear that it is the reduction of armies rather than of navies that is of the first importance to the world at the present time."²¹ If such reduction of land armaments could be achieved, Coolidge suggested, then further naval reductions and limitations would be facilitated. The President obviously had in

18. Ibid., pp. 105-106.

19. Ibid., p. 106.

20. Austen Chamberlain, British Foreign Secretary to the American Chargé, F.A. Sterling, April 6, 1925, in ibid., p. 107.

21. Message of the President of the United States to Congress, December 8, 1925, in ibid., p. xiii.

mind the armies of continental Europe and elsewhere, and not the United States, for he noted, "Our standing army has been reduced to around 118,000, about the necessary police force for 115,000,000 people." There was no intention of increasing the size of the United States Army, stated Coolidge.

"The general policy of our country is for disarmament," declared Coolidge, "and it ought not to hesitate to adopt any practical plan that might reasonably be expected to succeed."²² He observed that the United States was carefully avoiding "anything that might be construed as a competition in armaments with other nations."²³

Thus the atmosphere in which legislative decisions were made in 1926 was in part colored by the President's desire for reduction of armaments, and as little change in the international status quo as possible. Collective security, along Wilsonian lines, had been rejected, but strong emphasis was placed upon attempts to negotiate collective agreements to limit or reduce armaments, as well as to prescribe the rules of warfare. The goal of the Coolidge administration seems to have been the achievement of many of Wilson's ideals, but at a lower price, in terms of national sovereignty and independence of action, as well as literally. The ground force was looked upon as a local constabulary and as a protection of the territory of the United States. The Navy was maintained for the protection of traditional "American interests" abroad. It was the "good right arm" of the State Department, and could be reduced in size if America's chief competitors would reduce their navies accordingly.

22. Idem.

23. Ibid., p. xix.

By 1926 the overriding theme of declarations in both the Executive branch and in Congress was economy. "Economy is the handmaiden of preparedness," Coolidge had said in 1926.²⁴ Coolidge told the Congress a year earlier, in a concise expression of his political philosophy, that "The age of perfection is still in the somewhat distant future, but it is more in danger of being retarded by mistaken Government activity than it is from lack of legislation."²⁵ Coolidge was, of course, unwilling to leave the nation's defense to private enterprise, but some of the most compelling influences operating on his administration were the desires to lower governmental expenditures and thereby to reduce taxes; to erase the national debt and toward this end collect as much of the war debts as possible; and finally, for the purpose of economizing, to maintain as small an armed force as seemed feasible. These goals were shared, in general, by a large part of the Congress, and shaped to some extent the then current military planning. Official thinking about national security in the inter-war years has been summarized by a colonel in the Army's War Plans Division as follows:

Until the enunciation of a policy of hemisphere defense, peace, pacifism and economy over a period of twenty years had forced the War Department to accept a military mission which contemplated a passive defense of the Continental United States and our overseas possessions. Such a mission is only consonant with the stonewall defense of complete isolation. 26

"Pacifism and economy" behind the shield of "stablized" world naval forces were the vital concepts which tended to set the limits

24. Message of the President . . . December 7, 1926, in Foreign Relations, 1926, xxiii.

25. Message of the President, December 8, 1925, loc. cit., p. vii.

26. Col. J.W. Anderson, General Staff, War Plans Division, undated (ca. 1939), quoted from War Department Files, in Mark S. Watson, The War Department: Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations, Historical Division, U.S. Department of the Army, I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1950), 88.

within which decision-making was to occur in 1926. Final determination of the military posture of the nation constitutionally gravitated toward Congress. For, as President Coolidge has stated in his message of 1926, "The amount and kind of our military equipment is preeminently a question for the decision of the Congress, after giving due consideration to the advice of military experts and the available public revenue."²⁷

In sum, at the close of the first World War, President Wilson had attempted to dramatize the two alternative choices the nation had in meeting what he saw to be a new position of world leadership and responsibility. These choices were international collective security, under which nations could pool their power for mutual protection, or an independent, nationalistic development of instruments of coercion through the building of a garrison state. The majority of the electorate who chose Republican administrations and Congresses in 1920 and 1924 were apparently choosing neither alternative, as they seemed to reject the premise of world power and responsibility. But the Republican leadership was well aware, at least, of the world-wide business and financial interests of the nation, and the realities of world power relationships. Then, too, the intangible effects of Wilson's idealism upon the conscience of some of the administration leaders was a factor. They chose to attempt the "middle course" in providing for national security, rejecting both the League of Nations idea and the need for a large and burdensome military and naval establishment.

There were, as always, cross pressures operating to produce this choice of a "middle course" policy. A strong tide of nationalism was rolling in over the nation in the wake of post-war reaction,

27. Message of the President, December 7, 1926, loc. cit., p. xxiii.

cynicism, and a growing disillusionment regarding the "real causes" of the war. This nationalism was expressed in a wave of anti-foreignism, which in turn contributed to fears of "entangling alliances" with the schemers of European politics, and resulted in anti-Oriental outbursts and discriminatory national immigration legislation. The social and economic atmosphere of the 1920s was also not conducive to the engenderment of widespread feelings of mutual world responsibility.²⁸

The government was in the hands of those who had an innate admiration and respect for business enterprise. Or, as Senator George Norris once wrote, "The early twenties brought the American people to their knees in worship at the shrine of private business and industry."²⁹ The governments elected were inclined for the most part to represent these feelings.

But there were problems of world power relationships which had to be met, if only in the interest of America's powerful business interests. There were serious rivalries with Great Britain and Japan which had to be dealt with. For, as Calvin Coolidge is alleged to have said, "The business of America is business." Such problems were not to be met in the manner of strong executive leadership, for this was against the avowed governmental principles of Harding and Coolidge. Lacking this, Congress assumed a powerful position in the formulation of foreign policy, and pressured the executive into calling a conference of competitive nations for the limitation of naval armaments, and other agreements for mutual security. These agreements were not allowed to be cast in forms that could be labeled

28. See, for example, Schrifftgiesser, op. cit., and F.L. Paxson, op. cit.,

29. Quoted in Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America, p. 369.

as "alliances," but were in fact agreements to inhibit national ambitions in certain areas of the world, these to be underwritten by other agreements to limit the instruments of coercion. These latter agreements were based upon the traditional doctrine that naval, and thereby national, strength lay in a certain number of battleships and supporting naval forces. Official policy was to reject as heresy the claims of the "air radicals" as will be seen, that the traditional doctrines needed, at least, to be revised to take into account the strong hints of the World War that new and revolutionary weapons promised to outmode or greatly modify the validity of those doctrines.

Once having tasted the delights of limiting armaments, and the potential effects this method might have on further decreasing the demands on the nation's treasury, and thus on the taxpayer, greater armaments reduction became the goal of Republican leadership, especially in Congress. Thus was previewed the move to outlaw war completely which was to be culminated a few years later in the Kellogg-Briand Pact.³⁰

This general atmosphere of reducing expenditures on armaments produced great pressures on the Army and Navy professional leaders, causing them to cling adamantly to traditional doctrines, organizations and weapons even in the face of obviously different and new technological developments. This was in part because they were faced with the immediate responsibility of protecting the nation's security, and apparently felt little freedom to experiment with new weapons, doctrine and organization. A grant of new freedom of action and large sums of money to a comparatively new service such as the air service would have meant a curtailment of the activities and strength of the Cavalry,

30. See Ferrell, op. cit.

Artillery or Infantry, and of battleships in the Navy. Those in power were usually not inclined to weaken the well-established and more stable services to the advantage of the novel and undisciplined air service, or to theoretically attractive but untried military doctrines.

All in all the oceans seemed to most observers as wide as ever and dependable bulwarks of national security. Although there were warnings of potential air attacks upon American cities, the oceans still looked wide and deep to those who gave these problems a second thought. No war seemed likely to call again for an aggressive expeditionary force. Many Americans seemed determined never again to be lured into a "foreign" war. Two of the major parties had included in their 1924 platforms a proposal for a war referendum to let the people decide, the implication being that never again would America be so foolish as to enter a war unless directly attacked. It was widely agreed that a sizeable Navy was essential for the maintenance of those protective oceans as comfortable moats. But there were indeed those who were interested in having the Navy, also, to function as "the good right arm of the State Department." To this latter function, Robert LaFollette would, and did, shout "imperialism," but he was outshouted by those who would maintain, undisturbed by the problems of foreigners, their regained "normalcy," and "Coolidge prosperity."

The issue of national security might be said to have narrowed down, by 1926, to a debate between those who insisted on the maintenance of the status quo, both in America's world position and in the technical equipment and organization of the armed services, and those who foresaw significant changes in international power

relationships and the technological development in the weapons of war, both of which were seen to be intimately interrelated.

The outcome of this debate was greatly influenced by the "American endeavors for world peace which consisted in undertaking to combine the idea of political and military isolation with that of moral and material involvement."³¹ What Americans and their foreign affairs leaders seemed to desire, in the view of a post-factum observer, was "a world peace profitable to themselves without paying for it."³² But Calvin Coolidge, viewing the outside world and taking note of America's geographical isolation, had probably expressed a widely held American sentiment when he pithily inquired: "Who's gonna fight us?"

31. Frank H. Simonds, American Foreign Policy in the Post-War Years, (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1935), p. 54.

32. Ibid., p. 58.

PART III

As "practical" men, military leaders are interested in what will work, and generally the crucial test of a new weapon, doctrine, or organization for warfare is the severe test of the battlefield. Tried and tested military doctrines, as well as men and machines, generally have more appeal to the professional soldier than theoretical, experimental systems, which may seem to possess military power on the drafting board, or in peacetime maneuvers, but have not passed the final test of actual combat.

Emerging theories of air power during and following the first World War embodied theoretical claims for military aircraft which a large majority of the leading professional military men rejected as untried, untested and therefore unreliable. The claim for an independent function, or mission, for aircraft in national defense and warfare was at the heart of the discussion.

The dispute over this claim was to confound congressional policy-makers who were dependent, in large measure, upon the expert advice of military professionals. History is replete with the conservative reactions to technological developments including revolutionary weapons of warfare. There is a reluctance on the part of military men to accept or adopt new weapons, much less to change their doctrines of warfare, until their effectiveness has been clearly demonstrated, preferably in battle.

The air radicals in the post-war period argued that the worth of aircraft had been proved in the war. Most of the leading professional military and naval leaders questioned this argument. Really radical ideas are rarely encouraged by the structure of military

hierarchies.* Disaster or defeat in war, often at the hands of an enemy utilizing revolutionary or drastically improved weapons, has sometimes been necessary to produce acceptance by military leaders of radical changes in weapons and systems.

In the midst of the post-War I debate over the worth of revolutionary weapons and radically changed doctrines of warfare, congressional policy-makers were obliged to make decisions in the face of conflicting advice from the "experts." The following Part will explore the various claims, arguments and rebuttals which were at the core of the post-war aviation controversy. Here will be described the competing ideas in the legislative struggle.

* It is generally assumed that this is true of all bureaucratic organizations. But it is suggested here that such resistance is especially true of military bureaucracies.

CHAPTER VIII

EMERGING THEORIES OF MILITARY AIR POWER

"Those of us in the air have had a vision into the future, which unquestionably is correct."¹ Both the assertion and the tone in these words of the stormy petrel of the United States Air Service, Billy Mitchell, gave promise of the lively controversy which was to follow the World War regarding military air power.

This "vision into the future" had perceived the evolution of a fundamental doctrine that "the airplane possesses such ubiquity, and such advantages of speed and elevation, as to possess the power of destroying all surface installations and instruments, ashore or afloat, while itself remaining comparatively safe from any effective reprisal from the ground."² This was the fundamental doctrine of air power which was to grow out of the preachments of Mitchell and his fellow air radicals after the World War; a doctrine which was to rock the foundations of traditional national defense policy.

There was by no means universal agreement that such a doctrine was "unquestionably correct" either then or for the future. The proponents of this doctrine were rudely called to order in the fall of 1925 by a naval spokesman who rhetorically inquired, "How long must the people of this Nation be pestered with airforce claptrap and propaganda?"³

1. William Mitchell, "Before Pershing in Europe," (unpublished manuscript), Mitchell Papers, undated, ca. 1927, Preface, p. 5.

2. Edward Warner, "Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare," Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. by Edward M. Earle, p. 485.

3. Capt. William Pye, Assistant Director of War Plans Division, Office of Naval Operations, in Morrow Board Hearings, p. 1375.

The major technique of warfare that was the outgrowth of the fundamental doctrine of air power, according to exponents, called for a separate, independent military organization with unique missions independent from the Army or Navy. Whether such missions, such as strategic bombardment, were valid doctrines of warfare, was to be the central issue under debate. To the Navy, such a proposition was "claptrap and propaganda." An Army spokesman, testifying in 1926, implied that the claims of air radicals were "99 per cent bunk."⁴ In the official eyes of the War Department, Mitchell's "vision into the future" was "pure theory."⁵ There were indeed loud and authoritative voices raised to challenge its correctness.

It will be recalled that a congressional investigation committee in 1920 had found itself divided in its views on the future of military aviation.⁶ One group of Congressmen, having surveyed America's World War aeronautical effort, concluded that aviation would always continue to be "simply an arm" of the traditional ground forces, while another group saw military aviation potentialities as being "beyond . . . dreams." These divergent views were symptomatic of a fundamental split, in both lay and professional opinion about air power, that was to confound decision-makers in 1925 and '26.

As earlier indicated, there were those who insisted that the military airplane was a revolutionary new instrument of force and destruction. Its potentialities demanded an immediate reorganization of the national defense structure, a redefinition of military and naval strategy and tactics, and a new balance of armed forces, favoring aircraft. These were the heretics, the radicals, desiring root changes

4. Brig. Gen. Harry A. Smith, Assistant Chief, War Plans Division, in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 589.

5. Morrow Board Hearings, p. 1239.

6. House Report No. 637, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess.

in military organization, but who, at the war's end had in fact not yet set forth a clearly defined doctrine. Organizationally, the key word in their thinking was "independence" - independence, that is, from War Department General Staff control, and the opportunity to develop a technique of aerial warfare and the equipment for its application. As for doctrine, the vaguely-defined concepts of "command of the air," and the nucleus of the idea of strategic bombing as an independent mission, set within a broader context of "total war" seem to have been emerging.

From the record, however, it is difficult to separate the doctrinal from the organizational arguments, as they often went hand in hand, and obviously were not clearly separated in the minds of many of the radicals.

On the other hand, the groups charged with the formulation of national defense doctrines, as will be seen, interpreted World War experience with aircraft quite differently from the radicals, and reached different conclusions regarding organization. The General Staff of the War Department and the Navy's General Board, when interpreting the lessons of the war, conceived of military aircraft as useful new auxiliary weapons. Yet such weapons were species, not genus, and the tendency was to set limits upon their utility. It was officially concluded by the groups controlling national defense policies that the only mission of aircraft was in conjunction with the traditional missions of the Army ground forces or the Navy surface forces.

There were those, of course, who took middle views regarding the organizational and doctrinal controversies engendered by these significant differences of opinion between the radicals and the

traditionalists. Yet the doctrinaire groups, on both sides of the controversy, had support powerful enough to create what became a bitter domestic controversy. This dispute left its mark on the national security organization, and has affected inter- and intra-service relationships to this day.

The period 1919 to 1926 abounded in official military studies, special presidential boards and commissions, and congressional committee hearings and reports on the role of military aircraft in national security organization. There were also battleship bombing and anti-aircraft artillery tests designed to show either that the airplane, equipped with guns and bombs, was or was not a revolutionary new weapon, which either did or did not call for immediate changes in the strategy and tactics of land and sea warfare. The basic organization for national security was at issue.

The task of analyzing the theory of air power of the mid-1920s is increased by its highly fragmental development. Indeed, air power is today still in its youth. Consequently it does not have, and perhaps could not have, its counterpart of Mahan.⁷ As late as 1949, Bernard Brodie could write that "the literature of air power is all fragments and polemics."⁸ But, as is frequently the case, yesterday's polemics provide much of today's theory. And although a great deal of the testimony, writing, and declarations of air power enthusiasts of the 1920s was slanted toward the organizational argument, these provide the source for the greatest part of the subsequently developed doctrines of air power.

7. It is recognized that Mahan's sea power doctrines were themselves developed fragmentally.

8. "Strategy as a Science," World Politics, I (July, 1949), 486.

As suggested earlier, the war ended with what many considered a failure of aircraft. It was clearly a failure in terms of the high hopes and expectations manufactured to produce public support of a gigantic aircraft manufacturing program in 1917, and this undoubtedly caused some amount of public and congressional disillusionment in the post-war years. But in the eyes of professional military leaders, both in this country and abroad, wide differences of opinion were to develop as to aircraft's role as an instrument of war. Some, indeed, stressing its limitations, definitely judged it as useless in any role other than that of direct support of ground troops.

Debate on this subject, and the controversies and bitter personal animosities engendered, produced, after the war, what General H.H. Arnold later recalled as "a different kind of war" in Washington.⁹ To the standard-bearer of the "radicals," Brigadier-General "Billy" Mitchell, the post-war environment for those embroiled in the Air-Service-Army-Navy controversies was "a life of political intrigue and four-flushing, where the person with the most glib tongue and softest handshake could get away with things he had not the courage to do against the enemy, or the ability to devise in time of peace"¹⁰ There are many other indications that the struggle between those with differing opinions was bitter and charged with emotion, and although there is no full record of the behind-the-scenes moves in this era of "political intrigue," the major outlines of the controversies can be constructed from available sources.

9. H.H. Arnold, op. cit., p. 86.

10. Burlingame, General Billy Mitchell, pp. 108-109.

General Pershing, Commander of the AEF, observes in his memoirs: "The tendency of our airforce at first was to attach too much significance to flights beyond the enemy's lines in an endeavor to interrupt his communications. . . ." Pershing made it clear that, in this respect, the airmen were going too far. It was his judgment that the proper mission of aircraft was "to drive off hostile airplanes and procure for the infantry and artillery information concerning the enemy's movements."¹¹ Pershing was to later assign somewhat wider functions to aircraft, but clearly during the war he was skeptical about the tendency of airmen to stray from the beaten path of direct infantry support. As noted earlier, aside from the exaggerated and wild press headlines in 1917 regarding the potentialities of aircraft, such as "striking at the heart of the enemy," there was little truly independent action or mission conceived and carried out by the American air units.

The idea of strategic bombardment in the war was first discussed on a wide scale in Great Britain, and had culminated in the formation of an independent Air Force under General Trenchard, with the definite mission of strategic bombardment.¹² This unit was formed partly under the pressure of public opinion, which had been enraged by German attacks upon London and demanded retaliation.

There was considerable discussion in British military journals in 1917 and 1918 of the doctrine of strategic bombardment. F. Handley-Page, who as a manufacturer of bombing planes was not a disinterested observer, was writing in August, 1917, "If one imagines a fleet of

11. Pershing, op. cit., II, 337.

12. See C.G. Grey, A History of the Air Ministry, (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1940), pp. 81-87. Also H.A. Jones, The War in the Air, VI, 1-27, 101-117, 136, and Appendices. For pre-war discussions of aircraft utility, see H.G. Wells, The War in the Air, (New York: Macmillan, 1908); R.P. Hearne, Aerial Warfare, (New York: John Lane Co., 1909); and Claude Grahame-White and Harry Harper, The Aeroplane in War, (London: T. Werner Lowrie, 1912).

several hundred of such machines, each carrying one, two or even three tons of bombs, penetrating after a flight of many hundred miles into the very heart of the enemy country and destroying with high explosives the manufactories which are essential to the provisioning of the people and the munitioning of the armies, it will be evident that we should be able to strike a blow at the very backbone of the enemy's armies."¹³ Here was a simple statement of the basic principle of strategic bombing. This principle was to be a major issue in United States military circles before, during, and after World War II.

A Major H. Bannerman-Phillips, writing in April, 1918, declared,

It is of vital importance to the Allied cause that the raids on German production centers be kept up. The bombing immediately behind the lines is necessary and useful, but the strategic raids will have a more general effect toward ending the war. ¹⁴

These words were being written in the formative years of "Billy" Mitchell as regards air power theory, by men who had probably never heard of Giulio Douhet.¹⁵

Commenting on the formation of the independent British Royal Air Force in 1918, the Army and Navy Gazette observed that this new

13. "On the Value and Use of the Large Airplane," Aviation, (August 15, 1917) in International Military Digest, IV (February 1918), 57-58.

14. "Progress in Aeronautics," United Service Magazine, (April 1918), in ibid.; (July, 1918), 317.

15. Douhet, an Italian general, was one of the earliest theoreticians of air power doctrine. He wrote of the importance of air power as early as 1909, but his first book, Il Dominio dell'aria was not published until 1921, and his work was not well known outside of Italy until some years later. See Edward Warner, "Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare," loc. cit., pp. 489-497; also Douhet, The Command of the Air, trans. by Dino Ferrari (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942).

air force would be able to

intervene more and more effectually, and . . . more and more independently each month. . . . The directions which these operations may take appears at present likely to be along three main lines of action - the bombing of German nerve-centers and sources of supply, the attack of crucial points in the enemy's lines of communication, and the spraying of the advancing masses during an offensive with machine gun bullets and their harrassment by bombs. 16

It should be noted that direct support of the troops was the third and last function mentioned by this writer for the new independent air force.

Composing "rough notes" on the question of greater application of mechanical power to offensive military operations, Winston Churchill during the war had considered the use of aircraft and wrote in some detail of its potentialities in the war.¹⁷ Churchill observed that there existed "extreme diversities of opinion . . . as to the degree of effectiveness which can be expected from aerial attack." But, he wrote, "We have greatly suffered and are still suffering in the progress of our means of air warfare from the absence of a proper General Staff studying the possibilities of air warfare . . . as an independent arm cooperating in the general plan."¹⁸ Churchill did not go as far as the writers cited previously regarding strategic bombardment. He spoke of the idea that, "Even better than an operation against communications is an operation against bases." While not clearly defining "bases" it seems he was referring to military services in the rear, and not, strictly speaking, to selected economic or industrial targets in

16. April 13, 1918 in International Military Digest, IV (June, 1918), 269-270.

17. He was later to praise the efforts of the RAF in the Battle of Britain in the often quoted phrase: "Never have so many owed so much to so few."

18. W. S. Churchill, The World Crisis 1916-1918, II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), Appendix V, p. 312.

the enemy's homeland. He did not speak of striking at the enemy's "backbone," or "nerve centers," or "production centers," as had others. Indeed, he cautioned that it was "not reasonable to speak of an air offensive as if it were going to finish the war by itself."¹⁹

Churchill stated the significant and prophetic opinion that he had little faith in the morale effects of bombing the enemy's homeland. Opinions had been expressed in the United States in 1917 and elsewhere that the enemy could possibly be terrorized into surrender by a rain of bombs from Allied aircraft. But Churchill was clearly skeptical, for as he observed, "In our own case we have seen the combative spirit of the people aroused, and not quelled, by the German air raids."²⁰

Churchill admittedly took the more sanguine view of the capabilities of aircraft to "shatter communications, bases, or aerodromes." He recognized, however, that this opinion was seriously questioned by many.²¹ He foresaw also the possibility that "Considerable parties of soldiers could be conveyed by air. . ." as striking units against limited objectives, and these airborne "flying columns . . . could be organized to operate far and wide in the enemy's territory. . . ." But he concluded significantly, "the indispensable preliminary to all results in the air, as in every other sphere of war, is to defeat the armed forces of the enemy."²²

19. Ibid., p. 309.

20. Ibid., p. 310. For an interesting post-War II study of the psychological effects of aerial bombardment, see Irving L. Janis, Air War and Emotional Stress, A Rand Corporation Study, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951). See also U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Over-all Report (European War), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945); and ibid., The Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale, (Washington, 1947).

21. W.S. Churchill, op. cit., pp. 312-313.

22. Ibid., p. 313.

These and other ideas were to be assimilated into British air doctrine and were to greatly influence the development of American theories of air power in the post-war years. The mission of the British Independent Air Force, as enunciated by General Trenchard in 1918, was the destruction of "the German Army in Germany, its Government, and the crippling of its sources of supply." But because of the limited bombardment force available in the war, Trenchard realized that the effect on morale and the effect upon materiel stood in a proportion of twenty to one.²³

Doubtless the British doctrine of strategic bombardment, embodied in organizational form by 1918, had an impressive effect on "Billy" Mitchell who, according to Air Force historians, "was in a very real sense the founder of American air power."²⁴ Mitchell recorded in his diary in the spring of 1918: "The British have now combined all their air power under a separate ministry which is co-equal with the Army and Navy."²⁵ He was obviously impressed with Trenchard, his ideas, and the success of British airmen in freeing themselves from the old-line Army and Navy establishments. Writing again in his diary after a visit with Trenchard and a tour of British air stations in May, 1917, Mitchell commented: "It has never been my pleasure to work with or know a man that I more greatly respected, or in whose judgement I have had more confidence."²⁶

From British theory and practice, Mitchell and other American air proponents were to be instilled with two ideas which they were to

23. H.A. Jones, op. cit., IV, 136.

24. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 12.

25. Ruth Mitchell, My Brother Bill, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1953), p. 193.

26. William Mitchell's Diary, May 1918, Typescript, in Mitchell Papers. See also Levine, op. cit., pp. 94-97.

bring home with them from the European war. These were the concept of an independent bombardment mission for aircraft and a strong "separatist" feeling - a burning desire to be independent of non-flying, high-ranking regular Army officers. As Mitchell recorded in his diary in 1918,

The non-flying aggregation, who are all-powerful in the War Department, put non-flyers into the upper positions in aviation so as to get the rank. How many of our pilots are killed as a result of this seems to be a secondary consideration. It is terrible to have to fight with an organization of this sort instead of devoting all energy to the powerful enemy on our front. 27

But the ideas of separation, or of an independent air force, were heresy to the post-war thinking of the General Staff in the United States. Apart from its challenge to their power and prestige, the separatist idea made little sense to them. It violated both the basic principle of unity of command and General Staff interpretation of the war experiences which had allocated a limited, auxiliary ground-support mission to aircraft. The War Department was to be joined in this view of a limited role for aircraft by the Navy Department, which was motivated in part by the fear of the loudly shouted threat to the battleship's existence by the airmen. These airmen, by 1921, were stating directly or by implication that the battleship was an obsolescent weapon of war. The Navy was to become one of the staunchest antagonists of the Air Service radicals; but usually both the War and Navy Departments were to present a solid front against them.

In the United States it soon became clear that the claims to be made by the air radicals had received little testing on the European battlefields, and this was to weaken considerably their case in face

27. Quoted in Ruth Mitchell, op. cit., p. 193.

of the practical-minded formulators of military policy in the post-war discussions of military reorganization. Out of the debate, discussion and congressional inquiries regarding post-war national security policy can be determined the various, and often contradictory, points of view being developed.

What were the official opinions promulgated by the various significant groups which were important elements in the congressional decision in 1926? What were the doctrines of the utility of aircraft that were developed by those influencing the formulation of policy? How were the "lessons" of the war interpreted by these various groups? As suggested, much of the expression of the doctrine that was developed seems to have been stimulated by the organizational arguments which began immediately after the war. Debate usually centered around proposals, which took various forms, for a separate air force within a department of defense, or upon administrative details of promotion, pay and privileges. This debate was generally instigated by the air service radicals who were almost universally opposed by both the Army and the Navy during this period. "Consolidation," or "unification" of the various military services, giving the air service an equal status with the older services, was to be the crux of much of the argument. Discussions for and against this reorganization scheme provide the main source of information about the various doctrines of the utility of military aircraft.

The following chapters will describe the interpretations set forth by the several significant groups as the "lessons" of the war regarding the utility of military aircraft. Segments in the pattern of an air power doctrine will be pieced together in an attempt to show as much of a theory of air power as existed in this post-war

period. It was the task of the major actors in the decision-making process under study to deal with these various contending claims and arguments and to render decisions affecting the national security.

CHAPTER IX

WAR DEPARTMENT AND GENERAL STAFF REACTIONS

The war-time \$640,000,000 initial appropriation for the huge aircraft production program had been passed by Congress without explicit General Staff approval. The martial spirit had upset the traditional patterns of congressional-War Department-General Staff relationships, and the General Staff had been left behind in the rush. Because the war-time aircraft program had, by 1919, been considered a failure by many in and out of Congress, and with the general post-war retrenchment in the area of national security and the reaction to military expenditures, the General Staff was able to climb back into the saddle.

While many air enthusiasts had hoped that General Mitchell would return from the European war to become Director of the Air Service, this was not the case.¹ The post was given to Maj. Gen. C. T. Menoher, who had commanded the infantry "Rainbow" Division during the war and who was known as a stern disciplinarian.² The War Department apparently hoped to place the firm hand of control over the "stormy petrel." They may have sensed the trouble ahead. As Director of the Air Service, Menoher was to oppose the congressional proposals for a separate air force in 1919 and following years.

General Pershing, at the close of the war, had established a board of superior officers of the AEF to be known as the Dickman Board,

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1. H.H. Arnold, op. cit., p. 86.
 2. Ruth Mithhell, op. cit., p. 199.

to study the lessons of the war as an aid in post-war formulation of military doctrine. The board was divided into sub-groups for the various arms of the Army, composed of the senior officers of those branches, with headquarters at Chaumont, France. The "superior board," headed by General Dickman, reviewed the findings of the various sub-boards. The branch board of the Air Service was headed by Brig. Gen. B. D. Foulois.³

Conclusions of the Dickman Board regarding military aircraft were prefaced with the statement that "No greater lesson can be drawn from the World War than that unity of command is absolutely vital."⁴ As for aircraft, specifically, having rejected the heresy of separate or independent organization, "Nothing so far brought out in the war shows that aerial activities can be carried on, independently of ground troops, to such an extent as to materially affect the conduct of the war as a whole." The board recognized the possibility of further developments in aviation technology that might change this conclusion, but not until America became a nation of "airfaring" people. The great expense of aircraft was specified. If it ever became possible to use in war only aerial forces, then expense was not to be considered; but as long as it was necessary to "maintain ground and water forces for the war, then the expense of aerial forces must be considered and the aviation provided must bear its proper relation to the other forces."⁵ This issue of division of funds among the various arms and services of the Army was to be basic in the controversy over aircraft. In the days of the Harding-Coolidge retrenchment

3. Testimony of Brig. Gen. Hugh A. Drum, Assistant Chief of Staff, before Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 21. For report of the Dickman Board, see House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 917-999.

4. Quoted in Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 21.

5. Idem.

in over-all military expenditures, it was to increase the difficulty of expanding air service activities.

"For the present," stated the Dickman Board report, "all questions of air tactics, air strategy and the employment of aviation must be governed by the well-known and established principles of military art. Superior officers must be so thoroughly well grounded in the fundamentals of war that this important auxiliary will be used always in pursuance of the paramount object."⁶ These were, in essence, the official "lessons" from the war regarding aircraft as of 1919.

Later in 1919 the War Department was called upon again to draw up more specific statements on the role of military aircraft in the face of two congressional proposals - the New bill and the Curry bill,⁷ both of which called for the establishment of a separate cabinet Department of Air. To formulate an official War Department position on these bills, which would have consolidated all air activities of the government into one department, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker convened a board of officers, headed by the Director of the Air Service. The report of this board, known generally as the Menoher Board, was sent to Congress in late October of 1919.⁸

The Menoher Board reaffirmed the War Department principle of unity of command and concluded that "military and naval air forces should remain as integral parts of the Army and Navy and be completely under their respective controls both in peace and in war." The report stated: "There should not be created any military air force independent of Army and Navy control."⁹

6. Ibid., p. 22.

7. 66th Cong., 1st Sess., S.2693, by Senator Harry S. New and H.R. 7925 by Rep. C.F. Curry.

8. A full copy of the Menoher Board Report is contained in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 908-917.

9. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 22.

It is clear that the War Department was officially opposed to any separation or independence for the air service. This was repeatedly and flatly stated. The civilian leadership of the War Department was also to speak out on the subject in definite terms. In his annual report for the 1919 year, Secretary Baker discussed the question of the military utility of aircraft.¹⁰ Baker recognized that the development of the military airplane "carried the war into a third dimension and raised new questions as to the relations of aircraft to the prewar military and naval establishments."¹¹

Aerial bombing in the war was an important development, but also "constituted an abandonment of the time-honored practice among civilized peoples of restricting bombardment to fortified places" He concluded, however, that such bombardment as had occurred had had "no appreciable effect upon the war-making power of either nation."¹²

Baker made note of the enthusiasm that had developed in some quarters for an independent military aviation unit. But such "optimism and enthusiasm" were not based on a realistic appraisal of war-time experience, in which, he observed, aircraft were "primarily valuable for observation purposes." Such bombing operations as were conducted produced very little effect upon the enemy, he stated. "In the American Army, out of the 222,252 casualties admitted to hospital [sic] as a result of battle injuries, only 141 were occasioned by airplane bombs," he said.¹³

The "usefulness of airplanes for observation purposes and for fire control in the present state of development of aeronautics far

10. U.S. War Department Annual Reports, 1919, Vol. I, Part I, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920).

11. Ibid., p. 68.

12. Idem.

13. Ibid., pp. 69-70.

outweighs their effectiveness as implements of direct attack upon the enemy," declared the Secretary of War. Besides, a doctrine of strategic bombardment had to be ruled out upon "the most elemental ethical and humanitarian grounds."¹⁴

Baker took such a stand barring future "sensational" developments in aeronautics. Even with such developments, the clear implication was that the mission of aviation would always continue to be auxiliary support of ground armies.¹⁵

To separate aviation from the Army would make the Army and Air Service "rival services with the whole train of evils which such rivalry creates, evils which in peacetime mean contention before Congress for unbalanced appropriations, grievances and fretfulness about relative rank and rapidity of promotion, and in time of war the substitution of combined service prides for a single notion of pride in one service."¹⁶

While Baker was supported in these beliefs by the Dickman and Menoher Boards, this was not to be the case with the findings of the Crowell Commission. This group had been appointed by Baker in 1919 to survey aircraft doctrines and development in Europe. With Assistant Secretary of War Benedict Crowell as chairman, and composed of representatives from the Army, Navy and aircraft industry, this commission issued a report on July 19, 1919. The group had gone to Europe for an on-the-spot survey.

The Crowell Commission unanimously recommended the establishment of a separate air service. Also proposed was the creation of a separate air academy, on a par with West Point and Annapolis.¹⁷ The

14. Ibid., p. 70.

15. Ibid., pp. 69, 71.

16. Ibid., p. 72.

17. For full text of the report, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, Hearings before Committee on Military Affairs, on S. 2693, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), pp. 196-209.

report called for a single government agency, charged with conducting all air activities of the United States, military and civilian. "Upon the breadth of view and the vision of those in control of America's policies depends our future as an air power,"¹⁸ stated the report.

But the "vision" of the Crowell Commission contradicted that of the War Department. Secretary Baker told a Senate committee considering reorganization of the Army that the commission had "gone too far in suggesting a single centralized air service."¹⁹ He praised most of the report, however, except its conclusion, noting his concurrence with the commission's belief that adequate commercial production facilities must be maintained as a nucleus of a war-time aircraft industry. This was to be done through government aid to aircraft manufacturers.²⁰

Thus official War Department doctrine, based upon experience in the war and post-war interpretations of that experience, had been made explicit by 1920 on this question of the utility of military aircraft. Although for the most part slanted toward the organizational issues, and prompted by repeated proposals in Congress for more air service independence, or complete separation, the outlines of official air doctrine emerged in clear form. Much to the displeasure of the air radicals, the doctrine denied any independent mission whatsoever to aircraft.²¹

In 1924 and 1925 this official view was reiterated and sometimes challenged, as War Department representatives were called to testify before the Morrow Board (President's Aircraft Board, Dwight

18. Ibid., p. 201.

19. Ibid., p. 196.

20. Ibid., pp. 196-197.

21. Official War Department doctrine regarding an independent mission for aircraft was to be somewhat altered later, subsequent to the Lassiter Board Report.

W. Morrow, Chairman), and before the Lampert Committee.²²

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Brig. Gen. Hugh A. Drum, could be found telling the Morrow Board in 1925 that "aviation can only produce decisive results when closely teamed with ground forces." He cited as proof of this view the experience of the World War and referred to the findings of the Dickman and Menoher Boards.²³

General Pershing, taking a second look at the experiences of the war, had felt called upon to repeat his opinion on the military utility of aircraft in his Final Report of 1924. He wrote as follows:

During the war extravagant tales of havoc done to enemy cities and installations were often brought back, in good faith, no doubt, by some of our aviators, but investigation after the armistice failed in the majority of cases to verify the correctness of such reports. . . . it would doubtless be somewhat greater in another war, but until it becomes vastly more probable than at present demonstrated, it can not be said that we are in a position to abandon past experience in warfare. . . . The Infantry still remains the backbone of the attack. . . . The Air Service on land should remain an auxiliary arm. . . . 24

The official views of Secretary of War John W. Weeks were set forth in 1925, and in no way contradicted those of his chief military advisers nor his predecessors. The experiences of the war demonstrated the proper role and value of military aircraft, Weeks observed. Nothing since the war had developed which called for the assignment to aircraft of "any mission not already recognized by our World War experience."²⁵ Weeks stated that the War Department viewed the Air Service as a permanent and integral part of the Army, and rejected any proposal for separation.²⁶

22. House Select Committee of Inquiry into Operations of the United States Air Services, 68th Cong., 1st Sess., Florian Lampert, Chairman.

23. Morrow Board, Hearings, pp. 20-22.

24. Ibid., p. 25.

25. Assistant Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis presented Weeks' point of view in his absence. Quoting Weeks, in Morrow Board, Hearings, pp. 9-10.

26. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 10.

The Chief of Staff in 1925, General John L. Hines, stated that the Army's "fundamental doctrine" was that aircraft's mission was to "aid the ground forces to gain a decisive success."²⁷ "I am of the opinion," said Hines, "that the Air Service, because of the limitations imposed by natural laws on the operation of aircraft as well as the necessity for unity of action, will always be an auxiliary arm or service. It can never by itself defeat an enemy."²⁸ He continued:

Wars, whether on land or sea, will be won in the future, as they have been in the past, by the comparatively slow but irresistible force which is able to move from one strategic position to another - take it, hold it, and move on to the next. On land, this force is the Infantry; on sea, it is the battleship. An Air force can not do this. Aircraft will always be limited as to their radius of action. They will always be dependent on favorable weather conditions. They will always require land or sea forces for the protection of their bases. 29

Asked why it seemed to be the policy of the War Department to maintain as many cavalrymen as air servicemen, General Hines pointed to the patrol needs on the Mexican border and commented: "In my opinion the airplane is never going to take the place of the cavalry."³⁰

The views of the Chief of the Coast Artillery Corps of the Army on the question of the general utility of military aircraft are pertinent. It was the opinion of Major General F.W. Coe, in 1925, that aircraft had not brought any change in the importance of the defense of certain coastal points by fixed 16-inch coastal guns. Coast defenses had been certainly "strengthened" by the development

27. Ibid., p. 13.

28. Ibid., p. 16.

29. Ibid., p. 17.

30. Ibid., p. 96.

of aircraft. He was inclined to stress the importance of the counter-development of anti-aircraft artillery, which he considered would constitute a "very effective protection against a bombing plane seeking to reach a small definite objective."³¹

Assessing the value of military aircraft and its role in the defense of the American coast, General Coe declared that "The principles of war remain unchanged."³² Aircraft, he thought, "has not put any arm out of commission, but has simply become another force." He considered the idea of a separate air department as "untenable."³³

Coe argued, and this was to be a significant argument of many Army and Navy officers who stressed the limitations of aircraft, that in fact the development of the efficiency of anti-aircraft fire as a defense against aircraft was progressing faster than the development of aircraft.³⁴

These, then, were the views of individual War Department spokesmen appearing before an investigating committee in 1925. The fundamental doctrines of aircraft utility becomes apparent from an examination of their testimony, although there were of course variations. Some had a more limited view of the role of aircraft than others, but all who could speak with real authority from the War Department, in rejecting the proposal for a separate air department, also enunciated concepts limiting the mission of aircraft in military operations.

The collective views of the War Department were set forth before the Morrow Board, when General Drum submitted an official resumé of the War Department position.³⁵ Under questioning, General Drum gave an explanation of these views.

31. Ibid., p. 1140.

32. Ibid., pp 1141.

33. Ibid., p. 1142.

34. Ibid., p. 1149.

35. For full text, see "Resumé of War Department's Views on Questions before the Board," Morrow Board, Hearings, pp. 1238-1242.

Judging from its tone, the War Department statement was drawn up as an answer and a rebuke to the air radicals who in their testimony were clamoring for separation from the Army and the assignment of independent missions to aircraft. War Department policy was said to be based on "common sense, not on sensation; on concrete conditions, not on visionary aspirations."³⁶ Neither at the time nor in the foreseeable future had aircraft any function independent of the Army or Navy. The claim of an independent mission was "pure theory with no value other than as an argument for freedom from military control and discipline and for special class legislation." Further,

The War Department has prepared the Army as a whole to fulfill its national defense obligations. Its forces are balanced in accordance with specific national defense requirements. It has followed no shooting star or rainbow. 37

There was offered here, however, no definition of specific defense requirements.

General Drum chastised Air Service officers for establishing a "new gospel of the conduct of war," with a "new and catchy term 'air power,'" which seemed to teach that the enemy could be defeated by aerial bombardment alone.³⁸

Further taking issue with the air radicals, the War Department spokesman commented that since the war "extreme enthusiasts, as well as publicity artists, have preached an air doctrine far beyond the possibilities of present or future aviation. . . . The incoherency involved in this jumble of separatist's ideas casts serious doubt on the value of any of these proposals."³⁹ The proposals of these

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36. Ibid., p. 1238.
 37. Ibid., p. 1239.
 38. Ibid., p. 1247.
 39. Ibid., p. 1262.

enthusiasts could "not be justified on any grounds whatsoever." Such agitation for change meant "aggravating our present difficulties instead of applying a remedy," and worse, it would provide "aid and assistance for our enemies instead of their destruction and downfall." In short, the proposal of the air radicals was considered little short of treason by this War Department spokesman. "It will mean defeat in war instead of victory."⁴⁰

General Drum, expanding on the War Department's doctrine of warfare, explained that military planners had to be concerned with various possible war conditions, not just an attack upon our coast or outlying possessions. For this reason, the importance of sea power was very great, he said, and the development of aircraft had increased, rather than decreased this importance. But with its known limitations aircraft could be assigned no independent mission.⁴¹ He said:

The mission of our land forces is to maintain our territorial integrity and to seize and hold the enemy's territory. This is accomplished by means of armies; one vital factor being Army aviation. What separate responsibility or mission is open to air power? ⁴²

The War Department recognized no separate mission. Airplanes compared exactly with artillery. Its functions were auxiliary and limited.

According to the War Department, the ideas being put forward by the air radicals not only contradicted official military doctrine but also were implicitly in conflict with the President's economy program. The advocated increase in the size of the Air Service would involve large additional expenditures and the department was clearly unwilling to neglect other branches of the Army in order to increase

40. Ibid., p. 1269.

41. Ibid., p. 1252.

42. Ibid., p. 1253.

the size of the Air Service. Besides, much of what had been stated by Air Service officers had been "misleading, and, in fact, must have given erroneous impressions." The facts indicated, claimed the department, that instead of the Air Service having been neglected or treated as a "stepchild," rather it had received "favorite-son" consideration.⁴³

Summing up the War Department's argument against the heresy being expounded by the air enthusiasts, Drum observed that all the concrete proposals to that date could be characterized in one word: "separation." He rested the case of the War Department with three concluding points:

1. That 'air power' alone can not win a war.
2. That there is no separate tactical mission or strategical mission for 'air power.'
3. That the present Army organization is sound, and that the air corps as proposed by the Chief of the Army Air Service is unsound, strategically, tactically, and administratively.⁴⁴

General Drum's query, "What separate responsibility or mission is open to air power?" went to the heart of the post-war debate on military air policy. The War Department had replied specifically and with certainty, "None." But the air radicals were not content to let the answer rest as that. They were just as confident of the unquestioned correctness of the "vision into the future" which they claimed to have seen.

43. Ibid., p. 1241.

44. Ibid., p. 1247.

CHAPTER X

DOCTRINES OF THE AIR SERVICE RADICALS

"Those of us in the air knew that we had changed the methods of war and wanted to prove it to the satisfaction of everybody," wrote the leader of the Air Service radicals in 1925.¹ Mitchell was referring in this statement to the sinking of the Ostfriesland, but his assertion that military aviators had "changed the methods of war" was fundamental to the new doctrines of warfare which were emerging under his leadership.

Although most of the highest-ranking military leaders rejected the assertion that the advent of aircraft had fundamentally changed the methods of war, Mitchell and his band of followers set out in the post-war period to prove it to all who would see or listen. Behind Mitchell's leadership, most military airmen joined in chorus to insist that "the plane was genius, not species - a new and unique instrument of destruction of such revolutionary potentialities as to demand a sweeping reorganization of the national defense structure."²

Yet Mitchell and his fellow airmen had no well-defined theory of air power to offer in the years immediately following the war. Emerging from the closing days of the war and inspired by the example set by the British was the concept of an independent bombardment mission, which the air radicals grasped and began to develop. But the terms "air supremacy" and "air power" and "strategic bombardment" were ill defined in this period of incubation of theories of aerial warfare.

1. William Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. 71.

2. The Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 19.

What, then, are the sources of this emerging doctrine of air power, which underlay the arguments, official and unofficial statements, and polemics of the air radicals? One must turn to the testimony of airmen before congressional committees and investigating boards, official training regulations of the Air Service, and most important of all, the public statements, articles, books, and other preachments of Billy Mitchell, whose voice was undoubtedly the loudest in this period demanding basic changes in national defense organization and doctrines of warfare.

While Mitchell never developed a precise, closely-reasoned and consistent theory of aerial warfare, he was dogmatically insistent upon the need for radical change in national defense structure. During the days of his court-martial in the winter of 1925, Mitchell wrote in a large and generous handwriting: "If the country wants national security, it must have national defense. Present system impossible and obsolete -- I have outlined a system by which it can be obtained."³ From his numerous writings in the eight-year period following the war, one finds at least an "outline" of the infant doctrines of air power.

The War Department had posed the rhetorical question as to whether there was, in fact, a separate responsibility and mission for the air service. Mitchell's answer contradicted the flat "No!" given by the War Department, and he proceeded to underscore his affirmative reply in a variety of ways.

The Mitchell literature is abundant.⁴ Yet all of his writings are argumentative and polemical, and from them one could construct

3. Mitchell Papers, Court-martial File, ca. 1925.

4. By 1942 the Library of Congress could collect a thirty-three page bibliography. Ann Duncan Brown (comp.), A List of References on Brig. Gen. William Mitchell, 1879-1936, (Washington: Library of Congress, 1942).

several, perhaps contradictory, theories of air power. He left the elements of an air power theory to be put together by others. It is popular to refer to him as the prophet of air power, yet he foresaw many things that did not come about. General H.H. Arnold, many years later, commented in this regard that "People have become so used to saying that Billy Mitchell was years ahead of his time that they sometimes forget it is true."⁵ Being aware of the importance of public support, it is likely that he consciously exaggerated many of his beliefs in his public statements and writings. In his thousands of words, however, there seems to have been an incipient doctrine of air power which he never set forth systematically. Mitchell lived and was most active at the time when new and significant technological developments in aircraft occurred at a rapid pace. Doctrines of aircraft utility of 1918 were to be outmoded by the developments of 1921, 1923 or 1926.⁶ Mitchell realized this. "The European War was only the kindergarten of aviation," he wrote in 1925.⁷ Believing that 1925 was perhaps only the grammar school stage of aviation's growth, he did not hesitate to make claims for its utility which he perhaps knew were ahead of actual technological developments. He believed almost fanatically that these developments would come, but feared that they were being blocked by those in the Army and Navy with less faith than he in the potentialities of aviation.

5. H.H. Arnold, op. cit., p. 158. See also Levine, op. cit., pp. 401-405.

6. For technical developments of aircraft, see: Aircraft Yearbook, (New York: Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, 1919-); Aero Digest, (New York: Aeronautical Digest Publishing Co., 1921-); The Aeroplane, (London: Aeroplane and General Publishing Co., 1911-); Aviation Week, (title varies. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1916-); Jane's All the World's Aircraft, (title varies, London: S. Low, Marston and Co., 1909-); and U.S. Air Services, (title and publisher vary, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1919-).

7. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. 29.

Thus much of his effort was turned toward the struggle for separation from the Army and independence for the air services. In taking this stand and working toward this aim he was to employ a number of tactics which engendered bitter inter-service controversies, one episode of which General H.H. Arnold could jokingly describe later as "probably the closest thing to undeclared civil war since the Whiskey Rebellion."⁸ His tactics were to prove unsuccessful in immediately achieving his aims, although whether less flamboyant tactics would have retarded further or speeded the development of military aircraft in the United States remains a moot point.⁹ At any rate, Mitchell in 1926 was found guilty by a court-martial and was forced to resign from the Army because of outspoken public criticism of the national defense system and its management by his superiors.

No attempt will be made here to chronicle the events of Mitchell's stormy career. Not only are his own writings abundant, but he has been much written about. Treatments of his career vary from adequate biographies to air power polemics.¹⁰

But since Mitchell is acknowledged as one of the founders of American doctrines of air power, the chief elements of his thought

8. Arnold, op. cit., p. 103. Arnold was referring to the "cold war" that existed between the Air Service and the Navy in this period.

9. A post-War II official history of the air forces stated, "Time has proved the essential soundness of most of his basic contentions." The Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 25. For a work in which the author's thesis offers basic challenge to this estimate, see Marshall Andrews, Disaster Through Air Power, (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1950).

10. Issac Don Levine, op. cit.; Ruth Mitchell, op. cit.; Burlingame, op. cit.; Emile Gauvereau and Lester Cohen, Billy Mitchell, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1942); and William Bradford Huie, The Fight for Air Power, (New York: L.B. Fischer, 1942).

from his own writings need to be surveyed here. The idea most commonly associated with Mitchell's name is that of a "separate air force," with an independent mission, namely, strategic bombing of enemy targets. While Mitchell was an early advocate of a separate "unified" air service, concepts of strategic bombing or a theory of total war were mentioned but vaguely, if at all, in his earlier writings. The idea of strategic bombing and the concept of total war were obviously recognized by Mitchell early in the post-war period, but in 1921, when he published Our Air Force¹¹ he was not ready to set forth such ideas as dogma. His fundamental doctrine was that aircraft were weapons superior to those of land and sea. This inherent superiority called for fundamental revision of strategy and organization for warfare. All of Mitchell's preachments stemmed from this basic belief in the superiority of aircraft.¹²

"It may be at times the best strategy to damage and destroy property, and to kill and disable an enemy's forces and resources at points far removed from the field of battle of either armies or navies," Mitchell wrote.¹³ But generally speaking, the primary and principal mission of the air service was to destroy the enemy's air forces.¹⁴ After the enemy's air force has been downed, then "information of the enemy can be gathered by the airplanes to be used by the force employing them - which is decisive in itself - but also an air force can be applied at great distance in the attack and destruction of industrial centers, railroad centers, moving troops, trains and convoys."¹⁵ By 1921 Mitchell, who was then Assistant Chief of the Air Service, was not willing to stress publicly strategic bombardment as the primary,

11. William Mitchell, Our Air Force, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921).

12. Douhet, The Command of the Air was published by the Italian Ministry of War in 1921.

13. Mitchell, Our Air Force, p. xxii.

14. William Mitchell, "Air Power vs. Sea Power," The American Review of Reviews, LXIII(March, 1921), 273.

15. Idem.

independent mission of aircraft. The limited range of aircraft at that time doubtless entered into his restraint on this phase of his doctrine. He must also have recognized the force of the atmosphere of economic and political nationalism, pacifism and disarmament. The fact that Mitchell himself had not yet declared open war on the War Department General Staff also conditioned his public statements.

Although independence in air service control and mission were basic ideas in the development of Mitchell's thought, he had described his conception of the use of aircraft in the largest single air operation of the war - the attack on the St. Mihiel salient - as clearly and solely the support of ground operations.¹⁶ In his diagrams and charts used later to explain these operations,¹⁷ the bombing targets are clearly identified as enemy railway stations, ammunition dumps, bivouac areas and infantry columns. He writes of what he terms "Our independent, or what might be called 'strategical aviation' operated in brigades of about five hundred airplanes each . . . going clear into the middle of the salient about twenty miles behind the enemy's lines. . . ."¹⁸ So while he used the terms "independent" and "strategic" it is obvious that they were conceived in the limited sense of direct support of ground operations, which is far from the meaning of strategic bombing or independent mission which he later evolved. But his doctrine as thus expounded was flexible enough to be later adaptable to increasing range and bomb capacity of aircraft. It is clear from the succession of his writings that his thoughts on air power doctrine were gradually developing.

16. William Mitchell, "The Air Service at St. Mihiel," World's Work, XXXVIII (August, 1919), 360-370.

17. See ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 369.

By 1921 Mitchell was writing in popular magazines that the war had taught the need for fundamental changes in American national arrangements. "The most radical change in this respect," wrote Mitchell, "has been the injection of an entirely new force . . . the airplane, with its crew, its armament, its branches of the service - pursuit, bombardment, and attack - the new industries that had to be created for its upkeep, and new means of transportation through the air. . . ."19

Earlier, in 1919, Mitchell told a Senate subcommittee studying reorganization of the Army in dogmatic fashion that "an air force now, and in future wars, will be a decisive element in combat."²⁰ Describing to Senators what he considered the mission of aircraft, he stated: "Everything besides this observation aviation should be used for fighting enemy aviation, to obtain possession of the air, to get a decision in the air; afterwards it can be diverted either to attacking the enemy on the ground or water, or attack [sic] his elements which are further back than his troops are.

"In other words, the principal function of aviation today is to get a decision over enemy aviation."²¹

When asked about the effectiveness of the independent bombing activity of the Royal Air Force, Mitchell replied, "It was largely a political matter." Mitchell would give no direct answer as to its effectiveness, but commented that "it was just beginning" when the war ended.²² He did not emphasize the strategic bombing function of aircraft, but referred to it only as a possibility.

19. William Mitchell, "Air Power vs. Sea Power," loc. cit., p. 273.

20. U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, Hearings before Subcommittee on Military Affairs on S.2691, 2693, 2715, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 300.

21. Ibid., p. 303.

22. Ibid., p. 301.

Another lesson from the war was to receive increasing stress by Mitchell, beginning in 1919. This was what he judged to be the altered role of the Navy, resulting from the development of aircraft. The Navy was to become Mitchell's chief adversary. Although his quarrels with his own service, the Army, were prolonged and often bitter, they rarely equalled in intensity his frequent bouts with the Navy. He was not always consistent in his statements about sea power, but he clearly challenged the fundamental doctrines of the Navy. Sometimes he would imply that surface navies were completely useless; at other times simply that the battleship was of no value; and at still other times that the Navy should concentrate on submarines and aircraft carriers, whose flyers he assumed would be under the control of a "unified air service." Whatever role he variously assigned to the Navy, it was always one that relegated it to a secondary position in national security planning. Mitchell apparently became convinced at an early date that his organizational ambitions for the development of air power were being blocked by a deliberate and organized conspiracy led by the Navy. Mitchell's assertion that hide-bound admirals were "unable to face the fact that sea power was done for,"²³ gives an indication of his thinking on that subject and of why the Navy responded with powerful opposition to him.

Mitchell set out to prove his assertions that surface naval craft were easy prey for aircraft in a series of now famous bombing tests. His intention was clearly to substitute his vaguely defined concept of "command of the air" for the traditional Navy doctrine of command of the sea as the "first line of defense."

23. Quoted in Arnold, op. cit., p. 96.

It is unnecessary here to recount in full the details of the various bombing tests which were conducted in July and September of 1921 and in September, 1923, in the Chesapeake Bay and off the Virginia Capes, with land-based aircraft bombing and sinking various types of surface vessels, including capital ships.²⁴ The results of these experiments against surface craft were conclusive to Mitchell; to many naval leaders they were inconclusive and proved little.²⁵ Writing some years after the event, Mitchell declared, "Our experiments had gone forward so far in the fall of 1920 that I was able to announce definitely to Congress that we could destroy, put out of commission, and sink any battleship in existence or any that could be built."²⁶ The subsequent tests, to Mitchell, vindicated this opinion, and convinced him that "Sea power as expressed in battleships is almost a thing of the past."²⁷ This was of course unequivocally rejected by the leadership of the Navy, although some prominent admirals, most of them retired, agreed with Mitchell's views on battleship obsolescence. The Navy's views will be described in greater detail in the following chapter.

Mitchell attempted to make capital of his assumption that the battleship was obsolescent in view of the relative costs of aircraft and the super-dreadnaughts then being designed as capital ships of the Navy. By 1921 he was detailing the "comparative cost and efficiency"

24. For accounts of these bombings, see Mitchell, Winged Defense, pp. 41-76; Levine, op. cit., pp. 218-266. For a naval view, see Archibald D. Turnbull and Clifford L. Lord, History of United States Naval Aviation, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 193-204. See also Bernard Brodie, Sea Power in the Machine Age, (Princeton: University Press, 1941), pp. 401-403; "Professional Notes: Battleship vs. Airplane," Proceedings U.S. Naval Institute, L (December, 1924), 2081-2086; and W.C. Sherman, Air Warfare, (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1926), pp. 281-302.

25. See infra. pp. 176-178.

26. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. 41.

27. Ibid., p. 123.

of bombing planes and battleships.²⁸ Much of Mitchell's congressional support doubtless was gained by the argument that more defense could be bought for much less money by substituting bombing planes for battleships, and by the implication that wars could perhaps be fought and won entirely in the air.²⁹

To bolster his argument that bombing planes were "better buys" than battleships, Mitchell presented the following figures for public consumption in 1921. Bombing plane: Initial cost, \$45,000; speed, 120 miles per hour; percentage of hits in "danger zone of target," i.e., a battleship, 41.8 at 6,000-foot altitude; radius of operation, 300 miles. These figures he asked readers to compare with the following for a battleship: Initial cost, \$45,000,000; speed, 24.5 miles per hour; percentage of hits from guns at 15,000-yard range, 11.2 per cent; maximum range of guns, 20 miles.³⁰

Mitchell's developing air doctrine swept aside the increasing efficiency of anti-aircraft defense claimed by some. "From our experience in the war," wrote Mitchell in 1921, "with anti-aircraft artillery and machine guns, we have little to fear from such weapons on board seacraft."³¹ As an aviator he had little fear of anti-aircraft batteries on land, and on sea he said such fire would be even less effective because of the motion of the ship. Mitchell deprecated the efficiency of anti-aircraft defense on land or sea in much the same way that his opponents stressed its increasing efficiency. In so doing he made the same error as his adversaries, by citing World War experience as conclusive evidence.

28. See Mitchell's "Air Power vs. Sea Power," loc. cit., p. 274.

29. See, for example, Winged Defense, p. 126.

30. Mitchell, "Air Power vs. Sea Power," loc. cit., p. 274.

31. Ibid., pp. 274-275.

Mitchell did not hesitate to express the belief, which he was to repeat again and again throughout his career, "that the great battleship of the water is as vulnerable to air attack to-day as was the 'knight in armor' to the footman armed with a musket. We thoroughly believe that the control of the water is a question of the proper organization and application of the air forces of a country." The way to achieve this, Mitchell became accustomed to adding as a conclusion to his arguments, "is to unify all our aerial activities under one head and hold this head responsible to the people for the development of aviation."³²

Mitchell's views on air power, developed from his experiences and travels to Europe and the Far East during this period, were somewhat refined and gathered together in a book published in 1925. In Winged Defense Mitchell obviously drew upon the more than twenty-five magazine articles he had written since the war. Though not a model of systematic thought, and clearly a collection of revised magazine articles, Winged Defense was nonetheless, in 1925, the nearest thing to an American theory of air power as expressed by the leader of the "radical" group. As such it warrants some further examination.

There were four major phases to be considered in planning for national defense, according to Mitchell. The first phase was the preservation of "domestic tranquility" at home, in order that, in time of war, production of fighting materiel could proceed at an uninterrupted pace. In order to insure this condition, a ground army to maintain domestic order, and an air force to prohibit enemy air raids were needed.³³

32. Ibid., p. 277.

33. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. 101.

The second requisite to national defense was a means for protection of the coast and the nation's frontiers. This could be achieved by an air force, which would "fight any hostile aircraft or destroy hostile warships."

Thirdly, there had to be control of sea communications. "This can be done by aircraft within their radius of action, and otherwise by submarines," declared Mitchell.³⁴ He apparently accorded surface craft of the Navy only a "secondary" role in maintaining control of the seas.

The fourth consideration in national defense planning was "the prosecution of offensive war across or beyond the seas."³⁵ Such an expeditionary operation could be carried out "primarily under the protection of air power, assisted by submarines and an army." Mitchell envisioned the seizure or occupancy of a series of land bases from which the enemy could be attacked directly from the air. And only until we had gained complete "dominion of the air" could an invasion force be transported across the seas. An expeditionary force comparable to that of the first World War would be impossible in the face of a superior enemy air force. "Air power, therefore, has to be employed as a major instrument of war, no matter whether a land force or a sea force is acting on the surface of the earth."

It is clear that by 1925 Mitchell had relegated naval surface forces to a subordinate role. He considered submarines to be the "great destroyers of commerce."³⁶ In his view, surface navies had

34. Ibid., pp. 101-102.

35. Ibid., p. 102.

36. Idem.

completely lost their mission of sea-coast defense.³⁷ He did assign to the Navy, however, the mission of controlling sea areas beyond the radius of aircraft, but noted that the increasing range of airplanes constantly decreased even this naval function. The implication was that the days of the surface navy were numbered. "The surface ship, as a means of making war, will gradually disappear, to be replaced by submarines."³⁸

These developments held out promises for great economy, Mitchell predicted. The necessity of great expenditures for naval craft of the traditional types would vanish, as well as the "great bases, dry docks, and industrial organization that are necessary to maintain them."³⁹

Commenting on the bombing tests which sank the Ostfriesland in 1921, Mitchell wrote:

. . . some thought we should be restrained from doing it because it would lead people to believe that the navy should be entirely scrapped, as a thousand airplanes could be built from the price of one battleship. Others thought it should be done because air power had brought an entirely new element into warfare on the water, and if the United States did not draw the proper lessons from it, other nations would. 40

It is obvious that Mitchell was not planning to spend time disputing whatever notion might develop that the Navy "should be entirely scrapped."

The most important principle running throughout Mitchell's discussion of air power in Winged Defense was his belief that "Neither armies nor navies can exist unless the air is controlled over them."⁴¹

37. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. xvi.

38. Ibid., p. 18.

39. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

40. Ibid., p. 71.

41. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. xv.

By 1925 he was willing to go even further than previously in asserting the potentialities of aircraft. He was ready to predict the probability that "future wars again will be conducted by a special class, the air force, as it was by the armored knights in the Middle Ages . . . the whole population will not have to be called out in the event of a national emergency, but only enough to man the machines that are the most potent in national defense."⁴² These aerial machines manned by this special class would engage in air battles perhaps at great distances from the participating nations' frontiers and would be "so decisive and of such far-reaching effect that the nation losing them will be willing to capitulate without resorting to a further contest on land or water on account of the degree of destruction which would be sustained by the country subjected to unrestricted air attack."⁴³

Future invasions into the heart of the enemy country, therefore, will be made by air craft [sic]. Air craft do not need to pierce the line of either navies or armies. They can fly straight over them to the heart of a country and gain success in war. ⁴⁴

Mitchell then proceeded to express tersely the doctrine of strategic bombardment. The germ of this idea was to spread in the thinking and teaching of airmen in the 1930s,⁴⁵ and was to develop into one of the major elements in official air force doctrine in pre-World War II, and during and following that war.

42. Ibid., p. 19.

43. Ibid., p. 122.

44. Ibid., p. 126.

45. For a summary of the theory of air war being expounded at Army Air Corps Schools in the mid-1930s, see The Army Air Forces In World War II, I, 51-52. The similarity to Mitchell's views as expressed ten to fifteen years earlier is striking. A doctrine of strategic bombardment had already been developed in Italy by Douhet.

In 1925 Mitchell wrote:

To gain a lasting victory in war, the hostile nation's power to make war must be destroyed - this means the manufactories, the means of communication, the food products, even the farms, the fuel and oil and the places where people live and carry on their daily lives. Not only these things must be rendered incapable of supplying armed forces but the people's desire to renew the combat at a later date must be discouraged.

Aircraft operating in the heart of an enemy's country will accomplish this object in an incredibly short space of time, once the control of the air has been obtained and the months and even years of contest will be eliminated in the future. 46

In light of current air force doctrine, a further comment by Mitchell on the meaning of the potentialities of air warfare just described is interesting to record. He suggested that these potentialities of air warfare could act as a deterrent to war. Because the whole population of a nation would be exposed to attack under this new concept of total war, Mitchell suggested that "it will cause a whole people to take an increasing interest as to whether a country shall go to war or not."⁴⁷ This would be so especially in light of new technological developments such as "aerial torpedoes which are really airplanes kept on their course by gyroscopic instruments and wireless telegraphy, with no pilots on board, [which] can be directed for over a hundred miles in a sufficiently accurate way to hit great cities . . . the mere threat of bombing a town by an air force will cause it to be evacuated, and all work in munitions and supply factories to be stopped."⁴⁸

But there were obstacles to the achievement of this "new doctrine of war," which promised a "new doctrine of peace," wrote

46. Mitchell, Winged Defense, pp. 126-127.

47. Ibid., p. 14.

48. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

Mitchell in frustrated tones.⁴⁹ The development of air power with such promise was being selfishly blocked by the older services - the Army and the Navy - who saw in its development "the curtailment of their ancient prerogatives, privileges and authority."⁵⁰ These proved facts of air power, Mitchell charged, were being withheld from Congress and the public. He bitterly denounced the "conservatism of these permanent military services" which tended always to "perpetuate their existing systems and institutions and resist changes and innovations. They always fear change."⁵¹ The author of Winged Defense observed: "Changes in military systems come about only through the pressure of public opinion or disaster in war."⁵² He assigned a special duty to the people's representatives, noting that the legislatures must "periodically inspect and overhaul the professional organizations maintained for national security." Unless this were done faithfully, "increased expenditures, adherence to obsolete and useless principles of defense and an inexact knowledge of military conditions is always the result."⁵³ Mitchell did not question the competence of legislators to perform this function, having experienced quite a bit of support for his own ideas from individual congressmen and from large sections of the press.

He leveled a special finger of accusation at the Navy. Because he considered that surface navies, particularly battleships, were rapidly waning in importance, he expressed a belief that they were being maintained by the propaganda agencies manipulated by the

49. Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

50. Ibid., p. viii.

51. Ibid., p. 128.

52. Ibid., p. xviii.

53. Ibid., p. 128.

naval establishment for perpetuating the existing systems. "Not only do they resist any change which will take away from the battleship - its primary importance in sea dominion, but they tend to minimize and deprecate the ability of air power and submarines."⁵⁴ Mitchell would make an occasional oblique reference to the "special interests" which were blocking the development of air power. Writing many years later, his sister suggested that among these interests were the "tremendously powerful American railroads,"⁵⁵ and elsewhere the "steel interests" were said to have an interest in large-scale battleship construction. In a political speech in the presidential campaign of 1928 Mitchell asserted:

The administration was afraid it would cut down the sale of steel, largely from the state of Pennsylvania. So the Kibosh was put on the thing right away and all our [bombing of naval vessels] experiments stopped.

Mitchell went on to charge that the large number of members of the Naval Affairs Committee from Pennsylvania was a major factor in the success of the "special interests" in blocking the adequate development of American air power.⁵⁶

Mitchell's self-designated mission was to try to counter what he considered to be "propaganda" coming forth from the publicity bureaus of the Army and Navy and their friends. "Propaganda has a great effect upon the public mind," he wrote. Being well aware of this, he was apparently out to get his share, or more, of public attention for his own ideas. By 1925 he was prepared to state flatly that it was then "practical to do away entirely with the surface battleship, the airplane carrier, certain naval bases and dock yards, and many useless and expensive organizations of ground coast defenses."⁵⁷

54. Ibid., p. 133.

55. Ruth Mitchell, op. cit., p. 210.

56. Address at Wanapaca, Wisconsin on October 20, 1928.

Typewritten copy in Mitchell Papers.

57. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. 136.

In order to accomplish this, the "widest publicity" was needed for what he thought were the "facts" of national defense. He favored further limitation of armaments, feeling perhaps that the battleship and surface navies would be further limited, whereas aircraft and submarines might be left free of restrictions on the argument that they were essentially "defensive weapons."⁵⁸

Mitchell concluded his 1925 collection of essays on air power with his usual call for a "department of aeronautics" on a co-equal status with the Army and Navy. He called also for a definite "aeronautics policy" to meet the problems of organization, personnel, supply and training.⁵⁹

Although by 1926 many of Mitchell's concepts of air power were still hazy, they included the following general propositions:

1. The development of military aircraft called for a complete and radical change in United States defense organization and doctrine of war, with "air power" assuming the predominant role in all phases of future military operations.

2. Airplanes were constantly improving, they were the "great developing power;" ground armies were in a static stage; surface navies were obsolete or rapidly obsolescing.

3. Control of the air, by destruction of the enemy's air forces, is the primary mission of aircraft; no military or naval operations could be successfully carried out without supremacy of the air.

4. The combat functions of surface navies should rapidly be assumed by aircraft and submarines; the basic function of an Army in the United States, with a proper air force, would be to serve as a domestic constabulary.

58. Ibid., p. 120.

59. Ibid., p. 223.

5. Wars could be quickly fought and won in the air; with control of the air an enemy could be defeated quickly by strategic bombing, by the destruction of a nation's power to make war.

6. Official naval doctrine was fallacious, particularly its emphasis upon the role of surface craft, and its designation of the battleship as the capital ship.

7. Aircraft could certainly sink by bombing any surface vessel in the Navy.

8. Older services, conservative by nature, were clinging selfishly to outmoded doctrines and organizations; and from them Congress and the public were receiving false information.

9. Because of the potentialities of strategic bombing, including gas warfare, air power could serve as a deterrent to future wars. Populations threatened by total war from terrifying new aerial weapons would become more reluctant to sacrifice themselves to almost certain death.

10. Airmen belonged to a special fraternity of military fighters, which made it difficult for the other services to understand them.

11. These facts called for the immediate establishment of a Department of Aeronautics, on a co-equal basis with the Army and Navy, with personnel apart from the Army and Navy, all under a Department of National Defense.

12. Finally, the "former isolation of the United States" was a "thing of the past."⁶⁰ America was no longer relatively invulnerable to effective and sudden enemy attacks.

These were the major elements in the thinking of the leading air power radical in the mid-1920s. There were the main ideas being disseminated in the press, before congressional committees, and

60. Ibid., p. xi.

anywhere attentive ears could be found. The decision-making in Congress in the early months of 1926 was to take place in an atmosphere in which these ideas, many of them appealing to national sentiment at that time, were being loudly expressed.

Little of this doctrine and consequent techniques had found their way into the official publications of the Army, even of the Air Service schools, which prepared their own text-books. Army Field Service Regulations, issued in 1923, stated bluntly that the "mission of the infantry is the general mission of the entire force."⁶¹ In sections dealing specifically with the Air Service, the doctrine of military aviation as an auxiliary force, with no independent role, was suggested. Specifically, it was noted that the "mission of bombardment is the bombardment of ground objectives . . . vital to the functioning of the enemy's line of communication and supply."⁶² Clearly, the role of aircraft was direct ground support. The Field Service Regulations, which had not been revised in whole when the second World War began,⁶³ had been drawn up with the understanding that each arm of the service would prescribe its own principles of combat.

In the Air Service's Training Regulations current in January, 1926, little influence of Mitchell's radical theories is shown. The fundamental doctrine as set forth officially for the Air Service was that the air mission was "to aid the ground forces to gain decisive success."⁶⁴ The regulations do refer to "indirect support" as a

61. War Department, General Staff, Army Field Service Regulations, (Washington, November 2, 1923), p. 11.

62. Ibid., p. 22.

63. Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 44.

64. U.S. Army Air Service, Training Regulation No. 440-15, "Fundamental Principles of Employment of the Air Service," (January 26, 1926, Section I), p. 4. Quoted in Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 45.

mission for a General Headquarters striking unit, which under special conditions, had the role of "carrying out special missions at great distances from the ground forces."⁶⁵ This rather vague mention of a possible independent mission was as much of the Mitchell doctrine as had crept into official training regulations. It was perhaps as much of that kind of doctrine as could pass the General Staff editing section.

A more specialized text-book, Bombardment, issued at the Air Service Tactical School, Langley Field, Virginia, in 1926, seems to be the most detailed official statement regarding the utility of military aviation in combat, available up to that date. Here again, the "true role" of bombardment was said to be its use in conjunction with ground force operations. The authors seem dubious of the adverse effect of bombardment on enemy civilian morale, and do not express enthusiasm for the principle of strategic bombardment in general.⁶⁶

Thus it appears that the considerable Mitchell influence in the Air Service had not yet permeated official military policies. Mitchell's ideas were nonetheless held with varying degrees of conviction by large numbers of Air Service officers, judging from their testimony before congressional and other investigating groups in the post-war years.

Significantly, by the mid-1930s, however, the Mitchell "theories" of strategic air warfare, including the bombing of selected industrial targets, and the general concept of "command of the air," were being set forth as Air Corps doctrine in regulations, endorsements, training manuals, textbooks, and lectures at Air Corps schools.⁶⁷

65. Idem.

66. U.S. Air Service Tactical School, Langley Field, Va., Bombardment, (Washington, 1926), pp. 64-67, 72-74.

67. See The Army Air Forces in World War II, I, 45-46.

Within ten years after the stormy Air Service controversies of the winter of 1925-1926, many of Mitchell's basic ideas of aerial warfare were incorporated into the indoctrination programs of the Air Corps, presumably with War Department approval. Yet there were many bitter battles to be fought by the air radicals before the fundamental principle of a separate air force mission was fully incorporated into national defense doctrines in the United States.

By 1952 one could find that one of the essential "D-day" missions of the "independent" United States Air Force was "To conduct a strategic air offensive designed to destroy the vital elements of enemy war-making capacity."⁶⁸

68. Statement of Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Department of the Air Force Appropriations for 1953, Hearings before Subcommittee on Appropriations, 82nd Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 10.

CHAPTER XI

NAVAL REACTIONS TO AIR POWER DOCTRINES

"Has the Air Plane Made the Battleship Obsolete?" by William Mitchell appeared in the April, 1921 volume of World's Work.¹ This article was one of many in which Mitchell answered his own question in an unequivocal affirmative. In the same magazine, and immediately following Mitchell's paper, appeared another article on the same theme. This one, however, was entitled "The Battleship Still Supreme."² Its author, Lieutenant Commander Lee P. Warren, was as positive in his negative reply to the original question as the querulous flyer was in his affirmative. The challenge to traditional naval position was not to be ignored; and the Navy was prepared to exchange blow for blow with Billy Mitchell or anyone else who threatened to undermine naval prestige or existence.

The excitement caused by the development of aircraft and the ensuing claims for its value as a revolutionary weapon of warfare had, by 1921, placed the Navy and official naval doctrine between the jaws of a powerful vise. On one side was the headline-catching claim of Mitchell that aircraft could sink any ship afloat, and his subsequent "proof" of this claim in the spectacular sinking in July, 1921, of the former German Ostfriesland, a battleship of modern design and one which was thought by some to be "unsinkable." The other jaw of the vise being closed on the Navy was the move in Congress for the limitation of naval armaments, prompted in part by the "popular revolt against navalism."³

1. World's Work, XLI (April, 1921), 550-555.

2. Ibid., pp. 556-559.

3. See Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, especially pp. 100-117.

The bombing tests, which had included the sinking of submarines, destroyers and a light cruiser in addition to the German battleship, were considered as naval exercises in which the Air Service had participated "upon the invitation of the Navy Department."⁴ Actually it had turned out to be an Air Service "show," some of the details of which the Navy had been reluctant to arrange. The Navy feared the effect upon public opinion and Congress that would result from the sinking by aircraft of the formidable Ostfriesland. Some in the Navy feared that the public would not understand that these tests did not, and could not, simulate actual conditions of warfare, and were, at best, inconclusive.⁵

The Navy had certainly not intended that the bombing experiments be widely considered as a test of the relative importance of aircraft and battleships. But air enthusiasts, led by Mitchell, had labored to create the impression of a battleship-aircraft duel. This being a natural field-day for sensational journalism, Mitchell's hopes were rewarded, and the Navy was faced with the tremendous task of trying to control the interpretation of the results of the tests.

The official interpretation of the sinking by bombs of naval surface craft in the early summer of 1921 was initially classified as secret, and was not released to the public, but a report of the Joint Army and Navy Board on the subject was finally released on August 20. Apparently for prestige purposes, the report bore the sole signature of General John J. Pershing, senior member of the board, with the approving signatures of Secretary of War John W. Weeks and

4. U.S. Navy Department, Annual Reports, 1921, Report of the Secretary of the Navy - Edwin Denby, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 3.

5. For an expression of this view, see LCDR Lee P. Warren, op. cit., p. 559.

Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Acting Secretary of the Navy.⁶

Release of the Joint Board report was undoubtedly timed to offset the popular and congressional impressions from the tests regarding the utility of the battleship. Two weeks earlier, for example, Senator William E. Borah, one of the leaders of the fight for disarmament in the United States Senate, had declared:

The experiment off the Virginia coast demonstrated . . . that the battleship is practically obsolete. It has at least demonstrated that the type of battleship which we are now building will be obsolete within the next two or three years at most. 7

Of the \$400,000,000 then being spent on the Navy, Borah asserted, at least \$240,000,000 was being expended in a way that did not add security to the United States. Specifically he suggested that the Navy discontinue immediately the building of six battleships of the Indiana class.⁸

In the face of such reactions to the bombing tests by powerful members of Congress and influential segments of the press,⁹ the Navy was compelled to reaffirm its traditional doctrines. There was a clear need for an authoritative testimonial that the spectacular sinking did not spell the doom of the battleship. The Joint Board was composed of the highest ranking active professional officers of

6. Copy of the Report of the Joint Board on the Results of Aviation and Ordnance Tests Held During June and July, 1921 is printed in the Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st Sess., LXI (August 20, 1921), 8624-8626.

7. Congressional Record, LXI (August 5, 1921), 4708.

8. Ibid., pp. 4708-4709.

9. The New York Times editorialized: "Brigadier General William Mitchell's dictum that 'the air force will constitute the first line of defense of the country' no longer seems fanciful to open-minded champions of the capital ship." Quoted in ibid., p. 4709.

the Army and Navy. Its verdict on the results of the test undoubtedly would carry much weight with many persons. It should be noted that by August 11 President Harding had issued his call to the great powers to attend the Washington Naval Conference. As some saw it, this promised a new and even more dangerous attack on the Navy's ships than Mitchell's bombs.

The report of the Joint Board concluded that the bombing tests had been inconclusive as far as the role of the battleship was concerned. It was clear that the 2000-pound bomb which had sunk the Ostfriesland had made no more than a dent upon naval doctrine. And the Navy was being staunchly upheld in this regard by the Army.

The report did not deny that the projectiles dropped from aircraft in the tests had been "superior to the defensive features of construction of the vessel attacked."¹⁰ Yet the limitations of the test were stressed as were the alleged limitations of aircraft under actual battle conditions. It was conceded that design features of the capital ships in the Navy would have to be altered to meet this new threat, that anti-aircraft defenses would, and could, be improved. Basic to their analysis of this problem was the belief that the "history of war indicates that means of defense develop rapidly to meet the developments of offensive weapons."¹¹

The following general conclusions of the board were announced:

The battleship is still the backbone of the fleet and the bulwark of the nation's sea defense, and will so remain so long as the safe navigation of the sea for purposes of trade or transportation is vital to success in war.

The airplane, like the submarine, destroyer, and mine, has added to the dangers to which the battleships are exposed, but had not made the battleship obsolete. The battleship still remains the greatest factor of naval strength.

10. Report of the Joint Board, loc. cit., p. 8625.

11. Idem.

The development of aircraft, instead of furnishing an economical instrument of war leading to the abolition of the battleship has but added to the complexity of naval warfare. 12

The bombing tests had proved, concluded the report, that national defense called for the maximum possible development of aircraft and that aircraft carriers of the maximum size and speed were needed. The latter were to serve as the "effective adjunct" of the fleet.¹³

In Mitchell's own report on the experiments, he reached the following conclusions:

Air forces with the type of aircraft now in existence or in development, acting from shore bases, can find and destroy all classes of seacraft under war conditions with a negligible loss to the aircraft.

The problem of destruction of seacraft by [air] forces has been solved and is finished. . . .

There are no conditions in which seacraft can operate efficiently in which aircraft cannot operate efficiently. 14

The Secretary of the Navy, in his annual report for 1921, left no doubt as to the Navy's interpretation of the sinking of the Ostfriesland. Endorsing the Joint Board's findings that the battleship was still the "backbone of the fleet," he observed that such opinions "have always been held by the Navy Department."¹⁵

12. Idem.

13. Ibid., p. 8626.

14. William Mitchell's quite different interpretation of the tests, in a report to the Chief of the Air Service, somehow reached the public print in September, 1921. For a description of this report, see U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, XLVII (November, 1921), 1828-1829.

15. Navy Department, Annual Reports, 1921, loc. cit., p. 3.

But Secretary Denby also revealed the Navy's awareness of the need of an "adequate aviation force" which would operate as an integral part of the fleet.¹⁶ It is significant, nonetheless, that the Army and Navy had joined hands in face of the onslaught against traditional doctrine of the Army and Navy by the air service radicals. This was an early example of Army-Navy "unification" of opinion and power to block the drastic changes in organization and doctrine being dramatically advocated by those who believed, for various reasons, that the development of aircraft called for radical changes in the nation's military security policies.

Thus there was in the Navy, as in the Army, a serious controversy over the "lessons" from World War I, precipitated by the development and limited use of aircraft in that war and by the emergence of the mine and submarine.¹⁷ This controversy involved both doctrinal and organizational issues. There were among others the questions of the fate and future utility of the battleship; the issue of economy and efficiency, causing strong pressure for a Department of National Defense;¹⁸ and the agitation within the Navy for development of naval aviation and the establishment of a Naval Aviation Corps.¹⁹

The Navy had its own radicals. There was occasionally an admiral, sometimes retired, who rendered support to some of the views

16. Idem.

17. See Harold and Margaret Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, (rev. ed., Princeton: University Press, 1944), pp. 213-236; also Bernard Brodie, Sea Power in the Machine Age, esp. pp. 387-406.

18. President Harding had recommended to Congress in 1924 the establishment of a Department of National Defense, and though the recommendation did not call for a Department of Aeronautics, it was made over the objections of his War and Navy Secretaries. U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Executive Departments, Doc. No. 128, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924).

19. For a history of U.S. Naval Aviation, written from a Navy point of view, see Archibald D. Turnbull and Clifford L. Lord, History of United States Naval Aviation.

of the air radicals. These included Admirals William S. Sims and William F. Fullam. Fullam wrote under a pen name, as early as 1920 that "A strong air force, allied with submarines, torpedo planes, mines, and torpedos, may suffice, unaided by a fleet, to at least hold off an attack . . . on the nation's outlying island possessions."²⁰

Admiral Sims, retired officer who had been president of the Naval War College and commander of naval forces in European waters in the World War, was, by 1925, publicly deriding the Navy for having "no definite [air] policy and no real air organization."²¹ He bitterly denounced the Navy for its resistance to the introduction of new weapons and for "a kind of conservatism so very extraordinary that it would be quite impossible of belief were it not for historical evidence that establishes it."²²

Sims declared that the "fast carrier is the capital ship of the future."²³ But he expressed no faith in the competence of Navy leadership to meet these needs of the future, commenting that the recent appointments by Secretary Denby to the top naval positions had been a "crime against the people of the United States."²⁴ This was language as strong as Mitchell had become accustomed to use, but Sims did not concur with Mitchell's idea of a separate air force. He firmly questioned the official naval doctrine of the day; but he would have the Navy modernize itself internally.²⁵

By 1925 the Navy had become very self-conscious about the role of aviation, even though they did not incorporate such a doctrine as

20. Quoted in Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, p. 215.

21. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 1298.

22. Ibid., p. 1299.

23. Ibid., p. 1302.

24. Ibid., p. 1301.

25. Ibid., p. 1307.

Sims had expounded regarding fast carriers as the capital ship of the future. The battleship was to remain the "backbone" of the fleet in naval doctrine, but the importance of aviation as a worthy "adjunct" was becoming more and more apparent to naval planners. Writing many years later of the events of this period, General H.H. Arnold commented that the Navy had made a thorough study of events of this period and subsequently became "air minded in a big way." Arnold added, "They even went out of their way to find new means of using aircraft in naval operations."²⁶

To consider the effect of aviation on Navy doctrine and policy, the Secretary of the Navy in the latter part of 1924 appointed a special board, headed by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral E.W. Eberle, and including Major-General John A. Lejeune, Marine Corps Commandant, and six rear admirals, all holding top positions in the Navy.

This board held extensive hearings during the end of 1924 and early in 1925. At the end of the Eberle Board's deliberations "it required 80 sheets typed in single space merely to report the conclusions."²⁷ In its findings the board had been, in the words of naval aviation historians, "a little reluctant to admit the threat of aircraft against those battleships to which they had devoted their best years."

Aviation, the board concluded,

has introduced a new and highly important factor in warfare both on the land and on the sea Its influence on naval warfare undoubtedly will increase in the future, but the prediction that it will assume paramount importance in sea warfare will not be realized. 28

26. H.H. Arnold, op. cit., p. 122.

27. Turnbull and Lord, op. cit., p. 244.

28. Quoted in idem.

The limitations of aircraft were stressed and special emphasis was made of auxiliary use, such as in fire control and scouting, of aircraft. Aviation was welcomed into the Navy family, but in the status of an adjunct to the battle fleet. No change in the battleship supremacy doctrine, reaffirmed by the Navy in 1922, was advocated.²⁹

Thus in the year when the Army Chief of Staff was proclaiming that the airplane would never replace the Cavalry, the top admirals in the Navy were asserting that aircraft would never be of paramount importance in sea warfare. But the Navy seemed eager to press its development as a vital adjunct.

It is obvious that the Navy, by 1926, was "air-minded" even if in a limited way; at least it was out to convince the public that the Navy was conscious of the utility of aircraft. In his annual report for 1926, Secretary of the Navy Curtis D. Wilbur used the word aviation or aeronautics nine times on the first page of his report.³⁰ But, like the Army, naval doctrine granted to aviation no independent role or mission. It was simply a useful adjunct, and the battleship was the capital ship of the Navy just as the Infantry was the "queen of battles" of the Army. In 1926 the Navy maintained in full commission fifteen battleships, first line and only one aircraft carrier, second line, although two carriers were under construction.³¹

The Navy not only gave to aircraft a secondary role in its general doctrine for fleet operations, but determinedly offered public

29. Ibid., p. 245.

30. Navy Department, Annual Reports, 1926, Report of the Secretary of the Navy, November 15, 1926, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927), p. 1.

31. Ibid., p. 63.

challenge to most of the ideas being set forth by the air radicals, both within and outside of the Navy.

Within the Navy, rather widespread dissatisfaction was being publicly expressed by 1925 by naval aviators. Although practically all naval flyers rejected Mitchell's organizational scheme for a "united air service," many of them were undoubtedly affected by the general doctrines of air power articulated by Mitchell. And the "separatist" feeling had undoubtedly infected many of the naval flyers, who began to clamor for special "corps" status within the Navy. For example, the testimony of Lieutenant Commander Marc A. Mitscher, before the Morrow Board in 1925, is, with a different setting, rather similar to that of "Billy" Mitchell in many respects. Mitscher noted that there was acute dissatisfaction among the personnel of the Navy Air Service. He attributed it to the fact that

. . . the naval aviation officer feels that aviation has assumed a fixed and important position in the general scheme of warfare, and must be carefully considered as to its offensive value as well as its defensive value. [Aviation is] important enough to be commanded by personnel experienced in aviation matters who know, will appreciate, and can advance the viewpoint of the flying man. 32

He advanced briefly the concept of an aviation striking force, a "small navy within a navy," which was similar to some of the advanced ideas being promulgated within the Army Air Service.

But the immediate answer of those in authority in the Navy to their own rebels was similar to the General Staff responses to the Army air radicals. The limitations of aircraft were continually stressed, and it was pointedly implied that those agitating for

32. Morrow Board, Hearings, pp. 923-924.

change were motivated by a desire for special privileges and treatment, or "special class legislation" as it was sometimes called.³³

The official Navy position in sum seems to have been much the same as the Army's on the utility of aircraft. The Navy was willing to recognize the value of this new development in warfare, but not at the expense of the traditional weapons nor basic alteration of traditional doctrine. The Navy was willing to add aircraft carriers to the fleet, but not at the expense of battleships, battle cruisers, or other craft that fit more neatly into the doctrinal pattern, just as the Army welcomed airplanes as an auxiliary but not at the expense of losing elements of Infantry, Artillery or Cavalry. As early as 1920, the Navy had asked Congress for authority to construct four modern carriers, but Congress balked at the additional expense.³⁴

The Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 significantly placed no limitations on aircraft, but had limited the United States to 135,000 tons in carriers.³⁵ Even so, Congress had been prevailed upon to grant authority to add only two converted battle cruisers, the Lexington and the Saratoga, to the converted collier, Langley, in later years. The Navy's doctrine assigned to the battle fleet the offensive and defensive mission of command of the sea. This could not be accomplished through air power, since such control could be achieved only through control of the surface and sub-surface of the sea. In this function, the battleship was still the chief weapon. Naval doctrine seemed to stipulate that "command of the air above, like that of the water beneath, depended upon controlling the ocean's surface."³⁶

33. See testimony of Rear Admiral William R. Shoemaker, Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, in ibid., pp. 968 ff.

34. For details, see Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, pp. 213 ff.

35. For detailed account, see ibid., pp. 227 ff.

36. Harold and Margaret Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, p. 374.

But by 1926 naval doctrine had clearly changed from 1919 when the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William S. Benson was reported to have told Howard Coffin, "I cannot conceive of any use the fleet will ever have for aircraft."³⁷ As noted earlier, the Navy Secretary's annual report for 1926 devoted considerable attention to aviation, and indicated specifically that on June 30, 1926, 141 aircraft were attached to the fleets,³⁸ although there was still but one second line aircraft carrier operating with the fleets at that date.³⁹

While the Navy was devoting considerable attention to its own aviation, it was also preparing for battle on the organizational and doctrinal issues under debate outside the Navy Department, and the proposals being seriously considered by Congress to change basically the national defense organization. The Navy's internal agitation was under more or less authoritative control, but a more complicated and difficult task was to do battle with the air radicals outside the Navy. Although the Navy had maintained a powerful ally throughout the post-war period in the War Department General Staff, Mitchell and his adherents were still formidable foes, with strong friends in the Congress and sections of a "vocal" press.

In the significant hearings before the Morrow Board in the fall of 1925 the Navy sent loquacious Captain William S. Pye, assistant director of the War Plans Division, Office of Naval

37. Quoted in Arnold, op. cit., p. 97.

38. Navy Department, Annual Reports, 1926, p. 5.

39. For a statement of the official naval policy, see Edwin Denby in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Navy Department Appropriation Bill for 1925, Hearings before Subcommittee on Appropriations, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), pp. 39-43.

Operations, to do battle with the aviation heretics. Pye summed up the Navy's arguments against the doctrinal heresy of Mitchell and against Major General Mason M. Patrick, then Chief of the Air Service, who had set forth to the board what the Navy considered a radical and unsound doctrine of national defense. Patrick proposed the division of military operations into land-action, sea-action, and air-action phases.

The Navy's arguments were slanted toward the organizational issues, but these, as suggested, cannot be separated easily from the doctrinal issues. The questions of control, function, and technique were closely intertwined in these discussions.

Mitchell's proposal for a separate air force and Department of Defense, said Captain Pye, were based on "a theory of war which is unsound and foreign to the character of the American people." Furthermore, continued Pye, General Patrick's theory of three-phase defense operations was "unsound in theory and impractical in operation."⁴⁰ The Navy's representative did not attack Patrick's moderate proposal for an Army Air Corps, instead of a separate or united air force. The Navy would have been content with Patrick's compromising proposal. But the scheme for a Department of National Defense was said to be "unnecessary and unwise." The existing organization and doctrines of national defense were entirely adequate, contended Pye. All that was needed was "loyalty to one's service and mutual confidence between the services . . ." to make it effective.⁴¹

Captain Pye attacked what he called Mitchell's essentially defensive policies. Said he: "The aim of war is victory, not the

40. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 1368.

41. Ibid., p. 1369.

mere warding off of defeat." This required, he asserted, "the defeat of the enemy armed forces. The conquest of enemy territory. The breaking of the enemy's will to win." Mitchell, he said, had advocated the scrapping of the Navy, which was the "only arm of the national defense which is capable of initiating an offensive over-sea operation." This arm, he said, should not be sacrificed to the "air fetish."⁴² He argued that the best form of war strategy for the United States was the "strategical offensive," which could only be commenced with a navy in being, second to none.⁴³

The Navy representative denounced on the other hand the "ruthless" doctrine of attack upon enemy civilian populations and economic resources, noting that Mitchell's ideas were inconsistent, sometimes calling for defensive operations, at other times ruthlessly offensive measures.

It is time to stop pussy-footing and find out what the air force advocates, both here and abroad, intend to do in war. What are their objectives? Why do the proponents of attack on the civil population and economic resources believe that international law and treaties will not be binding? How long must the people of this Nation be pestered with air-force claptrap and propaganda? ⁴⁴

The Navy rejected the theory of ruthless strategic warfare against civilian populations and economic resources. Pye expressed the belief that if the "people of the United States" had seriously considered this question of international morality, they would reject

42. Ibid., p. 1371.

43. Ibid., p. 1372.

44. Ibid., p. 1375.

the idea of strategic bombing, and in so doing would abolish the "principal excuse for an independent air service." The Navy's feeling was that aviation must be used only against the enemy's armed forces and such private property as had a "reasonably close connection with the overcoming of enemy armed forces."⁴⁵ Pye then went into a detailed discussion and rejection of the theories expressed earlier before the board by air service spokesmen.

In outlining the Navy's views as to the capabilities of aircraft, such as their utility against submarines or armed merchantmen, he revealed that the Navy's doctrine of aircraft utility was still very limited. He stated: "The Navy believes that aircraft have a value in antisubmarine operations, but primarily as an information service for surface craft, such as destroyers or submarine chasers."⁴⁶

Thus the Navy's official doctrine at the close of 1925 was seen to be similar to that of the War Department General Staff regarding the utility of aircraft in military and naval doctrine. The airplane was an auxiliary, to be used as an adjunct to the operations of the fleet or to ground operations. This view was stated succinctly by Captain Pye when he declared it to be a "fact" that aircraft could be "legitimately" used "only in operations closely connected with the defeat of the enemy forces."⁴⁷ That part of the air doctrine which suggested an independent role or mission for aircraft was rejected. And both the leadership of the Army and the

45. Idem.

46. Ibid., p. 1379.

47. Ibid., p.1388.

Navy found themselves strongly allied in opposition to the creation of a separate air force or a Department of National Defense.

These traditional views, as will be seen, found strong support in the Congress. As the Sprouts have noted, "Navies were not merely agencies of defense, but also instruments of policy, as well as vested interests of certain important groups in society."⁴⁸ For these and other reasons, large and powerful sections of Congress apparently agreed with the statement in 1921 of Representative Frederick C. Hicks, member of the Naval Affairs Committee and chairman of its subcommittee on aviation, that ". . . the assumption that naval supremacy has definitely passed to aircraft is not justified." He thought it was "hardly probable that aircraft, even with great development . . . will supersede surface ships as the backbone of the Navy." The comments were occasioned by the bombing tests off the Virginia Capes, and Hicks rejected the idea that the experiments meant doom to the battleship. He admitted, however, that the results of the tests called for modifications in naval design, if not basic changes in doctrines of war.⁴⁹

On the other hand, it is likely that the sinking of the ex-German battleship, Ostfriesland, and subsequent bombing tests were among the most significant events of the period, even more important than the total experiences of the Air Service in the World War. If this is not true from a strictly technical viewpoint, at least its effect upon the doctrinal thinking of the armed services, though not immediately felt or expressed, and upon congressional and public

48. Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power, p. 101.

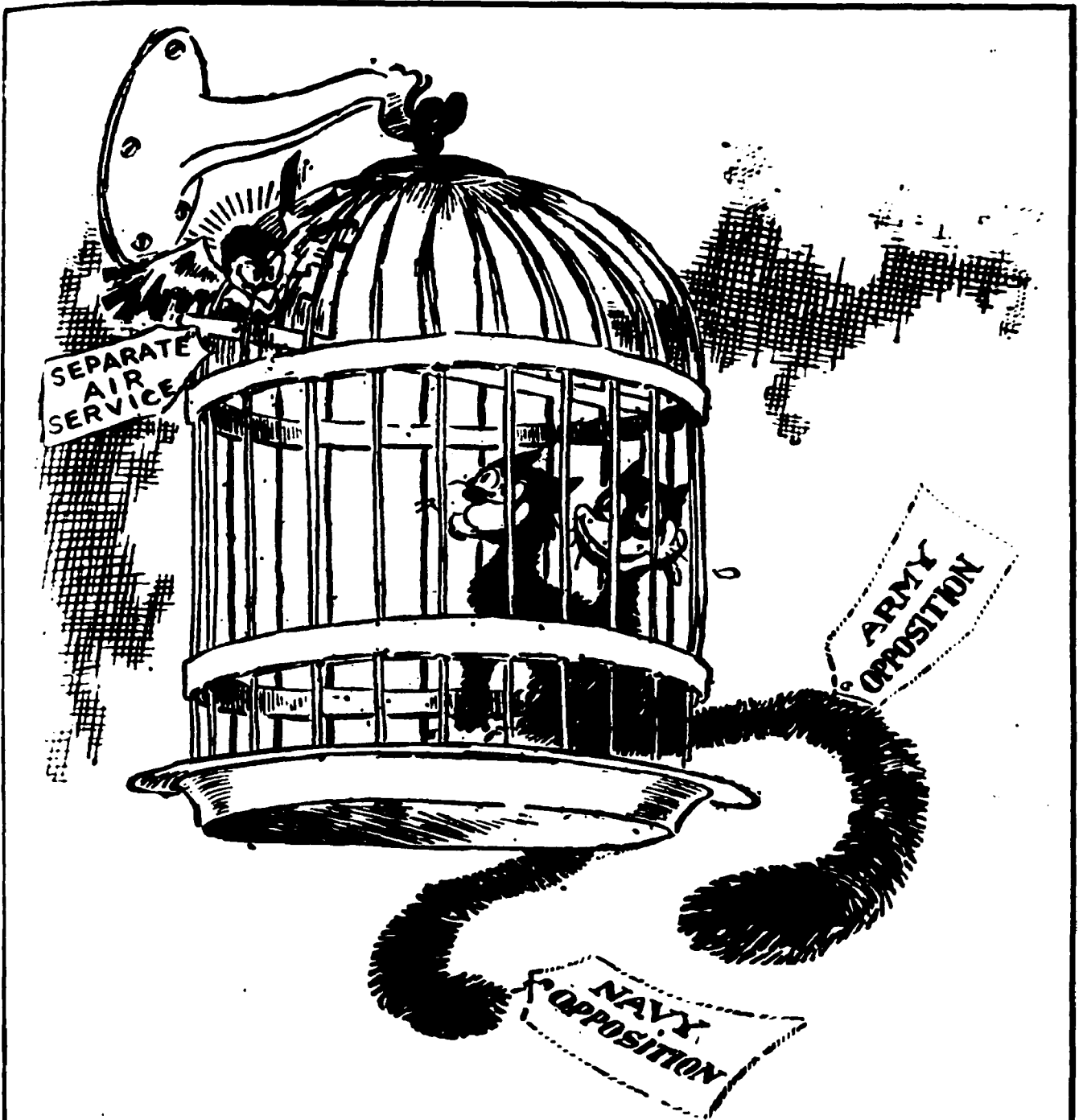
49. Frederick C. Hicks, "Aircraft vs. Dreadnaughts," in Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st Sess. LXI (August 20, 1921), 8622-8624.

opinion, was of far-reaching importance. It started to boil a doctrinal controversy which left its mark on both the eventual organization and theories of war and national security. It was, to the air radicals at least, both a stimulating experience and a new propaganda weapon for waging their own war with the General Staff and the General Board. In the words of one of the air radicals writing in retrospect, the bombing experiment was "a turning point for air power."⁵⁰

That there were basic conflicts in the views offered by the various spokesmen regarding the significance of the development of military aircraft is obvious.⁵¹ Yet the congressional decisions to be made in the spring of 1926 were to be based upon this conflicting information supplied by the many experts. In the process of reaching a decision, the principal actors had to make a choice between fundamentally conflicting information. Or what was more likely, as a legislative norm, the actors had to reconcile antithetical views into a compromise.

50. Arnold, op. cit., p. 106.

51. Morrow Board, Report, p. 3.



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ITS FUTURE ISN'T VERY PROMISING

—Hanny in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

PART IV

The American legislative process is a composite of a myriad of social forces and human actions and interactions. The preceding parts of this study have dealt with the general background and the major issues in the air power controversy during and following the first World War. The elements previously described constitute the general setting out of which evolved the significant decisions of 1925-26. In order to better understand legislative decision-making, it has been essential to describe the general context in which occurred the specific congressional actions to be subsequently described in detail.

The following section constitutes the core of this study: the legislative history and process that culminated in the Air Corps Act of 1926. Most major congressional legislation as finally passed and approved by the President has a legislative history that usually goes far behind the action of its introduction in the session of Congress in which it is passed. Therefore it is important to begin the legislative story as near to the beginning as possible. In the post-War I debate over the reorganization of the Army, the proposals to alter drastically the national defense establishment to allow for a new force in warfare and defense - air power - inaugurated in earnest a campaign that was to continue as a major subject of legislative debate and action for many years to come.

From 1919 onwards, the legislative hoppers in the Capitol in each session of the Congress were to receive various proposals for basically altering the national defense establishment, in order to give "independence" to air power, said to be a new force in national defense and warfare.

Part IV, then, deals with the legislative history and political processes culminating in a major congressional decision regarding military aviation, the Air Corps Act of 1926.

CHAPTER XII

A SEPARATE AIR DEPARTMENT DEBATED IN 1919 - 1920

By the end of 1919, military aviation had "already passed the point where it is to be regarded as a mere military adjunct or accessory."¹ This was the verdict of a post-war Senate military committee which was more impressed with the potentialities aircraft had shown in the war than with its failure to fulfill the great expectations which enthusiastic promoters had generated for it. The Senate committee also was apparently more impressed with some of the arguments of the air enthusiasts than with official War and Navy Department testimony on the subject.

Proposals to establish a separate air force, or a Department of Defense, or both, as noted earlier, had been made even before the war. But it was not until the post-war military planning period that the proposal received serious consideration. In 1919 a bill to create a Department of Aeronautics was introduced by Senator Harry New of Indiana, and it received careful consideration by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, which reported it out favorably.²

The New bill was the only one proposing a Department of Aeronautics among the many which were introduced from 1919 to 1926 ever to be reported favorably out of committee. The report stated:

1. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, Department of Air, Report No. 325 to accompany S.3348, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 3.

2. S.2693, introduced July 31, 1919, later revised as S.3384. See Senate Report No. 325. The vote in the committee was 9 to 2; see Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., LIX, 2301.

The majority authorizing this report believes that the successful future of aeronautics in this country can be assured only by making it the business of some central authority to properly care for and promote. . . . The committee further believes that as a military arm the science is as yet in its infancy but certain of very great potentiality, the limit of which cannot at this time be either foretold or foreseen. . . . its development can be successfully carried on under a separate department much more rapidly, efficiently and certainly much more economically than if left under the divided control of the Army and Navy. 3

These conclusions by the Senate committee had been reached over the protest of the War Department, including the Chief of the Army Air Service. "I am not in favor of the separation of the Air Service from the Army," Major General C.T. Menoher told the Senate subcommittee.⁴ General Menoher, a former Infantry commander, told the committee what was, in fact, the War Department General Staff official policy regarding the role of aircraft throughout these post-war years. "The Infantry I consider as the backbone of the Army always, it is the one determining factor always, but the other services, the Cavalry, the Artillery, and as I would have it, the Air Service would be the contributing factors, would be the auxiliary arms."⁵

The Chief of the Air Service went on to tell the committee:
I am willing to admit the Air Service is at least as important as the artillery as an auxiliary arm, but I do not believe it is a decisive arm. An independent air force may be used for long distance raids, for political purposes, and perhaps destruction and seizure of a point, but no independent air force could ever be a determining factor in the defeat of any nation. 6

3. Senate Report No. 325, pp. 1-3.

4. U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, Hearings, pp. 265-266.

5. Ibid., p. 266.

6. Ibid., p. 278.

The testimony before this Senate subcommittee is significant and worthy of brief summary here because the official positions taken by the War Department, including both civilian and military representatives, the Navy Department, and the dissident air radicals are, in general, the same positions they were to have expounded seven years later when Congress again approached a decision on the issue.⁷

In the 1919 hearings the air radicals, led by Mitchell and Foulois, were well supported in their advocacy of a Department of Aeronautics, separate from the control of the Army and Navy. Mitchell informed the Senators in his usual flamboyant fashion that "We believe that if we are allowed to develop essentially air weapons, means of fighting in the air, that we can carry the war to such an extent in the air as to almost make navies useless on the surface of the waters." He added the unusual assertion that "The Navy General Board, I might say, agrees with me on that."⁸ Mitchell's general contention that a separate air service was necessary had the support of aircraft manufacturers Glenn L. Martin and Clement M. Keys, vice-president of the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Corporation.⁹ Major General Leonard Wood, soon to be a contender for the Republican presidential nomination, also declared himself to be in favor of the idea of a separate air arm.¹⁰

Some of the strongest support for a separate air department had come in the issuance of the report of the Crowell Commission,¹¹ It will be recalled that the commission's report had unanimously favored the creation of a separate Department of Aeronautics, giving equal status, including an air academy, to the air service with

7. The question was not to be resolved favorably to the position of the air radicals, of course, until the National Security Act of 1947.

8. U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, 1919, Hearings, p. 300.

9. See their testimony in ibid., pp. 478, 566 ff.

10. Ibid., pp. 620 ff.

11. Supra pp. 144-145.

respect to the national defense establishment. The naval members of the commission, it is true, had appended reservations regarding naval control over purely naval aviation activities, but the commission's report nonetheless gave powerful backing to the air department proposal.

Although Secretary of War Baker, who had appointed the commission, had rejected these conclusions reached by the commission, his objections did not prevent his assistant secretary, Crowell, from later appearing before a Senate committee in support of a separate air department. Crowell told the committee,

The one point that has been impressed upon me by much of the testimony is the lack of a viewpoint from the bigger aspects of the matter. They [professional military and naval officers] seem to view it merely from its effect on their own particular service and not from the broad viewpoint of the defense of this country and the vital necessity of creating this new weapon of defense to meet the other great powers on an equal footing. I will leave to you gentlemen your constitutional duty of determining whether the future of this vital force in the defense of the country can be measured in the viewpoints of departmental interests. 12

Meanwhile the Navy had already begun what was to be a lasting and effective alliance with the War Department in opposition to this and subsequent bills which would have changed the established pattern of military and naval organization, prompted by the development of aviation. The Navy sent its Assistant Secretary, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who at the time of his testimony was Acting Secretary, to testify against the proposal for a separate air organization. He told the committee at

12. U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, 1919, Hearings, p. 1301.

once that "not only the Navy Department officially but the entire Naval service is absolutely opposed to the creation of another and separate branch of national defense."¹³ One of the main points in his subsequent argument was to be the later much-used point that the proposal under discussion would violate the cardinal principle of "unity of command." Further, in a practical way, "healthful competition between the Army and Navy is desirable," said Roosevelt. "Competition in the air would be eliminated if a united air service were established."¹⁴ Senator New, sponsor of the separate air proposal under consideration, asked Roosevelt what he considered to be the chief mission of aviation. The reply was:

Aviation as a whole is to use the air as an element which is intimately connected with the Army on the one side and the Navy on the other in totally different ways. . . . In case of the Army, scouting, spotting, and keeping off the attacks of enemy aircraft roughly. . . . Its function in the case of the Navy is exactly the function of the Navy itself. Why, therefore, should it be separated from the Navy? 15

Roosevelt went on to attack the testimony of General Mitchell, saying, "that testimony shows that General Mitchell knew absolutely nothing about the organization of the Navy Department."¹⁶ While Roosevelt was entirely willing to set forth the Navy's position that aviation was no more than an adjunct of naval warfare, he readily admitted, under questioning, that "The adjunct may become the principal factor eventually. . . . later on in the future aviation may make surface ships practically impossible to be used as an arm. That is possible."¹⁷

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- 13. Ibid., p. 727.
 - 14. Ibid., p. 728.
 - 15. Ibid., p. 731.
 - 16. Ibid., p. 735.
 - 17. Ibid., p. 736.

But he made it clear that such a development was far in the future, and wholly speculative. Cooperation and coordination by the Army and Navy were the requisites of a sound national defense program, Roosevelt suggested. As for the creation of a separate air force, he concluded, "Two is company and three is a crowd."¹⁸

Roosevelt's general position on the question was reiterated by the professional naval officers who also appeared before the committee. Among these, Vice-Admiral Hilary P. Jones commented:

. . . we have been more than a hundred years now trying to get the Army and Navy into close cooperation, both in peace and in war, and we are just getting right together now. To introduce a third one that we will have to work another hundred years to get together does not seem to me to be very wise. 19

In addition to the unqualified opposition to the proposal by the civilian and professional leadership of the Navy, the Secretary of War and the Chief of the Army Air Service, the Army Chief of Staff General Peyton C. March voiced his opposition. March thought it would be "very unfortunate to take away from the War Department the control of the military aviators who are necessary to a properly organized force. . . . From a military standpoint it is out of the question."²⁰ When called upon for his opinion, General John J. Pershing supported in full his colleagues in the War Department high command.

. . . the Air Service, so far as the military side of it is concerned, is really an auxiliary arm of the Infantry, of the land force, and I do not think you can divorce the Air Service at the present time..

. . . of course, those of us who have been in very close touch with the bombing by aviation always accept the stories they bring back with several grains of salt. . . . investigations after we advanced to the

18. Ibid., p. 743.

19. Ibid., p. 749.

20. Ibid., p. 105.

Rhine failed to develop any very serious or very important effect that was shown to be the result of bombing. Bombing is an uncertain sort of thing. 21

A separate air unit was said to violate the principle of unity of command, and Pershing was opposed to it.

Meanwhile the Army, spurred on by the report of the Crowell Commission favoring a separate Department of Aeronautics, set up its own board. The Secretary of War appointed a board of Army officers, headed by Major General C. T. Menoher, Chief of the Air Service, and composed of three other Major Generals of the Field Artillery. The task assigned to this board was to report on the Senate and House bills²² proposing the creation of a Department of Aeronautics. The board held meetings and conducted its survey of military opinion from August 12 to October 27, 1919. The Menoher Board "examined many individuals reports [sic], reports of boards, commissions, and other documents bearing upon the subjects under consideration." The board further held hearings and studied the replies obtained in a telegraphic survey of "important divisions, corps, and Army commanders who actually took part in combat using aircraft."²³

The manner in which the Menoher Board conducted its survey of Army opinion regarding aircraft came under the blistering criticism of one of the leading air radicals, Major B.D. Foulois, formerly Chief of Air Service, AEF. In a statement before the Senate subcommittee conducting hearings on the New bill,²⁴ Foulois charged that the telegraphic inquiry made by the Menoher Board had been "misleading."²⁵

21. Ibid., p. 1696.

22. New, S.2693 and Curry, H.R. 7925.

23. Report of Menoher Board, reprinted in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 908-917.

24. Foulois' statement provides a detailed exposition of the air enthusiasts' point of view in 1919. See U.S. Congress, Senate, Reorganization of the Army, 1919, Hearings, statement of Foulois, pp. 1259-1298.

25. Ibid., p. 1268.

The telegraphic inquiry, stated Foulois, had requested opinions on "only 10 per cent of the entire aviation problem." He charged that of the approximately fifty officers to whom the inquiries had been sent, "only two of them are practical flying officers."²⁶ He described the hearings held in Washington by the Menoher Board, in which flying officers had been asked to present their viewpoint. Foulois said he had been granted only twenty minutes to present his views, while others in a group of about twenty officers had been allowed even less time. "All [air] officers were examined in approximately three and one-half hours," he claimed.²⁷ Foulois was certain that aviation enthusiasts had not been allowed to present their case adequately to the Menoher Board. Speaking out in favor of the proposals before Congress, he also observed, "Based upon past experience, past performance, and upon the present policy of the General Staff, that the interests of the other combat arms will not be sacrificed in the interests of aviation, I see no definite assurance for adequate future development of military aviation in the United States Army, if such a policy is adhered to."²⁸

The Menoher Board had inevitably sought the opinion of Brigadier General William Mitchell. Apparently the board kept no official transcript of its hearings or deliberations. When Mitchell had appeared before the group on August 14, 1919, he had requested that such a transcript be taken of his discussion with the board but, according to Mitchell, after the members had deliberated briefly, in secret, this request was denied. A summary of Mitchell's version of his testimony can be found in the Mitchell Papers.²⁹ One of the

26. Idem.

27. Ibid., p. 1269.

28. Ibid., p. 1266.

29. Mitchell Papers. Typescript copy of summary, dated August 16, 1919.

members of the board, Mitchell records, "made the statement that he was trying to convince me that my contention [about the importance of aircraft and the need for a separate air department] was wrong." Mitchell further described his session with the Menoher Board as follows: "General discussion took place with General Menoher, General Coe, and General Snow, at random, about various matters having some relation to the Air Service, and which evinced an earnest desire on their part to learn something about it, and also showed conclusively that they knew nothing about it." Mitchell recounted that he set forth his arguments about the role of air power and the need for organizational change for its development. He concluded his impression of the meeting as follows:

There was nothing in this meeting to indicate that the minds of the members of the Board were not conclusively made up ahead of time, almost to the extent of having been instructed to render a report against the bill.

. . . The whole hearing impressed on me more than ever that, under the control of the Army, it will be impossible to develop an Air Service. 30

These concluding words of Mitchell are an indication of his trend of thought, and foretell of his subsequent actions in his fight to achieve "independence" for the air service.

The vast amount of testimony and opinion obtained by the Menoher Board sustained the official War Department views. Stated the Board's report:

. . . military men of all armies who have had the widest experience in the study of problems of national defense, and who, during the World War, were responsible for the successful conduct of large military operations, combining all means of combat, including aeronautics, are practically unanimous in the opinion that military aeronautics is in all respects a part of the army and that

to transfer it to a department independent of the army would seriously affect the efficiency of the Nation's combined forces as a fighting machine. 31

Opposed to these views, according to the board, were a "certain number" of military aviators, whose views had been given "careful consideration." The opinions of these air radicals, however, were the result, in the opinion of the board, of "limitations of vision regarding the great problems of the combination of all arms to accomplish decisive results."³²

The Menoher Board Report is a detailed analysis of the major alternatives of national aviation policy in 1919, as seen from the viewpoint of the leading Army generals in both staff and command positions. It forms the backbone of official War Department policy regarding the role and utility of aircraft. This policy was not to change appreciably in the next seven years. Although reports of other boards and commissions were to follow with slight variations of interpretation of the utility of military aircraft, there was to be virtually no diversion from the central theme that aircraft should not be separated from the command and control of the Army. The board placed heavy reliance upon the earlier findings of the Dickman Board³³ that "nothing so far brought out in the war shows that aerial activities can be carried on independently of ground troops to such an extent as to materially affect the conduct of the war as a whole."³⁴

In summary, the Menoher Board made the following points:

1. In wars of the future, "aeronautics will play an increasingly important role,"³⁵ Nevertheless, "An air force acting

31. Menoher Board Report in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 912.

32. Idem.

33. Supra pp. 140-142.

34. Dickman Board Report, quoted in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 913.

35. Ibid., p. 908.

independently can not win a war against a civilized nation, nor by itself accomplish a decision against forces on the ground."³⁶

2. Commercial aeronautics is not a "paying business" and must be stimulated and maintained by government aid,³⁷ but government must stay out of the manufacturing business. A single government agency should have charge of all procurement and aviation development work that is common to all branches of aviation.³⁸

3. A separate executive Department of Aeronautics is called for only if Congress is willing to adopt a minimum of a 10-year development program, expending several hundred millions of dollars a year on aircraft. Since this was highly unlikely, the "situation does not seem to warrant the establishment of a separate department."³⁹

4. The problem of adequate military preparedness and appropriations therefore is a matter for congressional determination. But, "the effective organization for a proper defense is purely a military question and, while the ultimate authority for such an organization must be derived from Congress, it is assumed that in reaching its decision Congress would desire the opinions of experienced military and naval men."⁴⁰ The implication here is that Congress should accept the considered opinion of "experienced military men" rather than the advice of the relatively inexperienced air radicals.

5. The major source of "agitation" for a separate Department of Aeronautics is the Air Service of the Army, whose major points were summarized by the board as follows:

"(a) A belief that it is desirable and essential to create a force for fighting purposes independent of either the Army or Navy.

36. Ibid., p. 911.

37. Ibid., p. 909.

38. Ibid., p. 917.

39. Ibid., p. 915.

40. Ibid., p. 912.

"(b) A belief that no future exists for the Personnel of the Air Service so long as it remains a part of the Army.

"(c) A belief that a military air force suitable to our position in the world will not be developed under the Army but that aeronautics will continue to be regarded as an auxiliary to other branches." 41

The report dismissed (a) as not in keeping with official military doctrine and concluded that (b) and (c) could be dealt with by a statutory reorganization of the Air Service providing for permanency of commission and other organizational aspects which would establish the Air Service on a par with the other arms.⁴²

6. The concluding recommendations were that "the Army and Navy retain as integral and essential elements of their organizations and operating respectively under their complete control of all military and naval air forces that may be provided by Congress;" that "further study" be made of the other organizational issues; and that the major policy determinations be left to the decision of Congress, which was expected to consult "experienced" Army and Navy officials.⁴³

Considerable attention has been given here to the findings of the Menoher Board for, as suggested earlier, its report was to constitute the foundation for Army policy in years to come in regard to this recurring question of the role and relationship of military aircraft to the over-all organization of the Army and Navy. And it had been convened to study the strongly supported Senate bill calling for a basic organizational change in national defense. This, then, was the "expert" advice offered by the War Department to the Senate committee having jurisdiction in the matter.

41. Ibid., p. 916.

42. Idem. This was done, in part, in the National Defense Act of 1920.

43. Ibid., p. 917.

In spite of the formidable opposition to the proposal for a Department of Aeronautics, including the advice of "best minds" of the War and Navy Departments, the Senate Military Committee was nevertheless impressed by the arguments of the proponents of Senator New's bill, which in addition to unifying all government military and civil aviation activities held forth the promise of economy and efficiency through the abolition of much overlapping of aeronautical effort. The Republican controlled committee seemed to be as much impressed by the economy and efficiency prospects as they were by the doctrinal concepts of aerial warfare that entered into the consideration. The aircraft industry was also eager for a positive government aviation policy. Thus, the Senate committee favorably reported the bill revised by Senator New establishing a Department of Aeronautics.⁴⁴ In general, the New bill provided for an executive Department of Aeronautics with the function of conducting all aviation activities of the government, civil and military. Military personnel would be assigned to duty with the Army and Navy through the new Department and would be under military control while so attached. A unified procurement and development system was provided for, all of these functions being conducted under the administration of a Director of Aeronautics, to be appointed by the President.⁴⁵

At the same time, in the House of Representatives, Charles F. Curry, of California, introduced a similar bill for the establishment of a Department of Aeronautics, although it differed in some detail from the Senate bill. The Curry bill, which in revised form was to be found still before the House Committee in 1926, called for a

44. Senate Report No. 325.

45. A copy of S.2693 may be found reprinted in Flying, VIII (September, 1919), 690-692.

Secretary of Aeronautics with cabinet rank, whose function was the supervision of all governmental aeronautical activities, military and civilian, and the establishment of an air academy. This bill, like the New bill, followed in general outline the recommendations which had been made recently in the report of the Crowell Commission referred to above.⁴⁶ Hearings on this and other House bills dealing with aviation were held, but no bill was reported out of committee.⁴⁷

Since Senator New's bill was the only proposal calling for a drastic reorganization of the military establishment to reach the floor for debate in the period under consideration, it is essential to review briefly the senatorial discussion. In presenting his measure for floor consideration, Senator New advised his colleagues that "the whole course of the United States with reference to the subject of aeronautics has been little short of absurd; it has not reflected any credit on us as a government or as a people." And he added "I say that with regret but I believe that the statement is justified by the facts."⁴⁸ New then traced the development of military and commercial aviation in the United States, decrying especially the current status of commercial aviation. His bill was said to be designed to remedy this state of affairs.

46. For a copy of the House bill, H.R. 7925, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., see a reprint in Aerial Age Weekly, IX (August 11, 1919), 1003, 1004, 1021, 1030.

47. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Army Reorganization, Hearings before Committee on Military Affairs on H.R. 8287, 8086, 7925, 8870, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (2 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919).

48. Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., LIX (January 28, 1920), 2151.

At one point in the debate, upon being questioned particularly by Senators William E. Borah and Reed Smoot, Senator New claimed that his proposed unification of government aviation activities might produce a saving to the government of \$63,000,000, these figures being based on the estimates for the coming fiscal year.⁴⁹

Senator William H. King observed that "The feeling has been that the Air Service up to date has been a wretched, miserable failure, through the mismanagement of somebody in the War Department."⁵⁰

Speaking apparently as a representative of the Navy, Senator Peter G. Gerry voiced the objections of the Navy to the bill. He expressed his belief that it would have been better if there had been a Joint Committee of Senate Naval and Military Committees established to consider this bill. Had this been done, he thought Senators would be "more conversant with the merits and demerits," of the bill.⁵¹

Senator Borah cautioned against haste. While there was in his opinion some merit in the proposal, he considered it to be a matter needing no immediate action. "There is no present necessity for it," Borah stated. "We can postpone these expenditures until we know more as to the ability of American taxpayers to take care of the budget which we must necessarily impose upon them for the next year." And he concluded, "It approaches a crime to add one unnecessary dollar."⁵²

Another significant statement, revealing the temper of the times, came forth from Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock, who said that "aviation is too little known and too little understood to justify the personal attention of the government." He did not believe aviation would be needed as a "means of defense" either at the time or "in the near future." And, feeling that there was no "urgency" about this

49. Ibid., p. 2185.

50. Ibid., p. 2193.

51. Ibid., p. 2195.

52. Ibid., p. 2244.

matter, he said: "I see no reason why the War Department will not be able to train its own aviators, or why the Navy Department will not be able to train its own aviators."⁵³

Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr., Chairman of the Senate Military Committee and at this time an ardent proponent of "preparedness," came to the aid of Senator New in a speech strongly supporting the bill. He said:

Senators may talk about economy; they may talk about waiting a while; but that kind of talk has gone on in this country for years and years and it has cost us in the last analysis \$26,000,000,000 of national debt and thousands of wasted lives in connection with this very last war. There is no economy in it. . . . Is the man today to be charged as a dreamer who will say that ten years from now, instead of seeing fleets of 400 machines, you will see 4,000, not only operating over the heads of troops but perhaps operating a thousand miles away from the base of the troops? Can the Army commander on the ground command the machines a thousand or fifteen hundred miles away? 54

Wadsworth was convinced of the need for the passage of the New bill, and prophetically declared: "People may say I'm dreaming about this thing but I am just as confident as I can be that whatever emergencies we shall meet in the future will be characterized in their first or second or third day of some great air battle, and it may be a thousand or two thousand miles off our coast; and a combatant force trained for that purpose will eventually become a part of the national defense of this country."⁵⁵

But Senator Wadsworth was aware of the forces in Congress which were likely to block the bill's passage. Senator Peter G. Gerry had indicated opposition as a member of the Naval Committee. Senator

53. Idem.

54. Ibid., p. 2247.

55. Wadsworth's support of proposals for basic change in the defense organization was to fade away in subsequent years.

Kenneth D. McKellar of the Post Offices and Post Roads Committee had raised some significant questions about control of personnel. These were ominous signs to proponents of the bill. Wadsworth apparently recognized this when he said:

The Senate and the Congress and the people may not be ready for it now; they may not be ready for it tomorrow; but it is inevitable. . . . We might as well open our eyes and see this thing. It is coming. We can sit here and talk economy, but we will save money if we will see it first. We are bound to see it eventually; and the trouble with us has been, through all our history, that we have ~~seen~~ these things officially last, and then have paid war-time prices for everything we have gotten. 56

Senator William H. King, evidently grasping for the correct solutions to the issue under discussion, expressed in the debate a bewilderment that was to be repeated again and again by legislators and others in years to come who were grappling with the problem of the most suitable national security organization. King confessed that he was "experiencing some difficulty in reaching a conclusion as to the wisdom of enacting the pending measure into law;" that "the experts who have testified are not always in agreement;" and that he had found "the greatest divergence of views among those who have given the subject consideration." He also expressed uncertainty because of this conflicting testimony, as to whether the proposal before the Senate created the right solution to the problem.⁵⁷

By January 31, 1920, when the bill again came up for Senate consideration, Senator New had apparently learned informally that there was not enough support for passage. In a statement on the Senate floor he noted that there was "still a very general misapprehension on the part of the Senators as to just what the bill proposes

56. Idem.

57. Ibid., p. 2249.

to do."⁵⁸ This was so, he thought, in spite of the fact that the Senate Military Committee had had the bill under consideration from June until November of the preceding year. He called attention to the opposition of the Naval Affairs and Post Offices and Post Roads Committees, and observed the particularly strong opposition voiced by members of those committees.

In light of this lack of support and especially the determined opposition which had been clearly indicated by the built-in pressure groups representing the Navy, the interests represented by the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, and other agencies, Senator New requested unanimous consent that the bill be recommitted to the Committee on Military Affairs.⁵⁹ Vested interests, whose spokesmen in the Senate were those Senators who regarded themselves as watchdogs for the status quo when particular interests seemed threatened, had made a show of their combined power which was easily sufficient to squelch any effort that would have altered existing power relationships. The proposal to establish an air department in the government threatened to do just that, and the vested interests combined their power in opposition. Unanimous consent was granted, and the bill was not heard from again. It was not until 1926 that legislation affecting national aviation policy, other than military appropriations, was to reach the advanced stage of floor consideration in Congress. The arguments pro and con in 1919, however, were to be repeated more than once in the years to follow. And the testimony given to committees for and against the establishment of some degree of independence for the military air service in 1919 was echoed in 1926.

58. Ibid., p. 2301.

59. Ibid., p. 2302.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEBATE OVER AIRCRAFT CONTINUES

In the spring of 1920 the Senate was debating an Army Air Service-Navy controversy over jurisdiction of coastal defense, a dispute arising from conflicting interpretations of the role of land-based aircraft in defending the seacoasts. The Navy, declared one of its spokesmen in the Senate, Miles Poindexter of Washington, "is asking only to be let alone, and the head of the War Department is asking the same thing."¹

The desire of the War and Navy Departments was apparently to be permitted to work out their own problems of overlapping and conflicting jurisdictions resulting from aircraft development. But those in the Air Service, insisting on fundamental changes in the assignment of defense missions, had gained the ear of some members of Congress, and the Army and Navy were not to be "let alone" in the years to come on the problems raised by the invention of aircraft.

Debate on Senator New's Department of Aeronautics bill in the Senate on January 31, 1920 was to prove a high water mark of such a proposal for the next two decades. Senator New's motion for unanimous consent for recommitment had been a parliamentary way of admitting defeat without the final act of being actually voted down. The powerful and influential opposition of the "best minds" in military and civilian circles had without too much effort killed the measure which had the enthusiastic support of the air radicals of the Army Air Service as well as an outspoken but outnumbered group of legislators in the Senate and House.

1. Congressional Record, LIV, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., 7529.

Meanwhile the War Department had been pressing for the statutory recognition of the Army Air Service as one of the combatant arms of the Army, which, it will be recalled, had been a recommendation of the Mencher Board and which many in the Army apparently thought would do much toward curbing the "agitation" and dissatisfaction of members of the Air Service. The Air Service had been separated during the war from the Signal Corps, but its existence was still for the most part based on Executive Orders and War Department General Orders. The Air Service had achieved a "semi-statutory" existence in 1919 when in the Army Appropriation Act for 1920 specific sums had been included for the Air Service as such.² In addition, another act passed in 1919 providing for the assignment of officers to the Army Air Service seemed to give congressional recognition to the existence of an Air Service.³ Air Force historians usually point to these two acts as the "birth" of the Air Service as a statutory agency, but it was not until the National Defense Act of 1920⁴ that the Air Service became a fully legitimate part of the national defense establishment. Under this act the Air Service was to be headed by a chief with the rank of Major General, an assistant with the rank of Brigadier General, and an authorized strength of 514 officers and 16,000 enlisted men. Flying units were to be commanded by flying officers, under the law, and additional flight pay of 50 per cent of base pay was provided for.⁵ With the adoption of this act the Army Air Service had become an integral part of the military establishment, but to the disappointment

2. Public Law No. 7, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 11, 1919).

3. Public Law No. 49, 66th Cong., 1st Sess. (September 17, 1919); see U.S. Statutes at Large, XLI, 108-109, 286-287.

4. Public Law No. 242, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess. (June 4, 1920).

5. U.S. Statutes at Large, XLI, 759-812.

of the air enthusiasts it was to remain under the control of the General Staff of the War Department, and its appropriations and expenditures were to be regulated as part of the War Department budget.

Meanwhile, it will be recalled that another congressional committee, after a six-months study of the war-time expenditures on aviation, had issued a report recommending a separate Department of Aeronautics earlier in 1920.⁶ The majority report labelled the war-time aviation effort a failure, and called for the establishment of a separate Department of Aeronautics. The minority report, signed by Democratic members of the committee, adhered to the War Department's views and opposed a separate department. This report, by its nature, is obviously the product of partisan political motives. No legislative action had followed this committee's report, however.

National aviation policy was again under consideration in 1921. At the request of President Harding, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics appointed a subcommittee composed of representatives of the Army, Navy, Post Office and Commerce Departments, and the aircraft industry. After study of the question of national aviation policy the committee submitted its report of April 9, 1921 to President Harding, who in turn transmitted it to Congress for consideration on April 19, 1921. In its report the committee had not departed from the well-established views on the organizational structure for the Army Air Service. Stated the report:

Aviation is inseparable from the national defense. It is necessary to the success of both the Army and Navy.

6. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, Aviation Subcommittee, Aviation, Report No. 637, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., Parts I and II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920).

Each should have complete control of the character and operations of its own air service. 7

The report advocated governmental encouragement of aviation, but observed that it was "considered impractical in time of peace to maintain a large armed air force." It recommended that the Army Air Service should be continued as a coordinate combatant branch of the Army, and also that Naval aviation activities should be centralized in a bureau of aeronautics in the Navy.⁸ Doubtless many leaders in the Army and Navy were relieved when President Harding gave his endorsement to the finding of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics that aviation was "inseparable" from the Army and Navy. But the controversy was to burst into flame anew with the bombing tests and other events to follow.

In 1920 the Army and Navy had become involved in a controversy over coastal defense that was to last for several decades. In coastal defense, where did the Army's responsibility end and the Navy's begin? With the advent of military and naval aircraft this problem became a point of Army-Air Service-Navy contention. Legislative friends of the Air Service "separationists" had amended the Air Service section of the Army Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 1922 to read: "That hereafter the Army Air Service shall control all aerial operations from land bases, and that Naval Aviation shall have control of all aerial operations attached to a fleet."⁹ This amendment had been brought to

7. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Report of the U.S. National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, Document No. 17, 67th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 3.

8. Idem. Backed by the President, the bill to create a separate Bureau of Aeronautics in the Navy Department became law on July 12, 1921. This significant development in naval aviation has been attributed by naval historians to the "activity of General Mitchell" who had given his "unwitting help" in this development. See Turnbull and Lord, op. cit., pp. 186 ff.

9. Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., LIX (May 24, 1920), 7522.

the attention of the Navy Department and when the bill reached the Senate floor, friends of the Navy went up in arms because it seemed to them, in the words of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, to make it "simply absolutely impossible for the Navy to carry on an air service." The chairman of the Senate Military Committee, Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr., immediately proposed to "perfect" the amendment by adding, "After the word 'fleet' it is proposed to insert: including shore stations whose maintenance is necessary for operations connected with the fleet, for construction and experimentation, and for the training of personnel." Senator Carroll Page, chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, complained that the amendment had been contrived in the House Military Affairs Committee. "It seems to me," he said, "that they are overstepping their particular bounds of propriety in seeking to regulate the Navy from the Army end." In the debate it became clear that both the War and Navy Departments were opposed to the amendment. Senator Lodge explained:

The two departments have made an arrangement between themselves, which is printed on a little leaflet . . . for cooperation in air service. . . . I hope the Senate will strike out the whole provision and let it go back to the House for reconsideration. 10

But the chairman of the Senate Military Committee favored the amendment, as he had revised it. Admitting that he had received word from the Secretary of War in opposition to the whole amendment, he commented, "There are occasions . . . when the Committee on Military Affairs has not followed the advice of the Secretary of War."¹¹ Wadsworth argued, "We are trying to reduce duplication. Even under this amendment there will be duplication."¹² This idea of duplication

10. Idem.

11. Ibid., p. 7523.

12. Idem.

was to continue to be one of the chief arguments for a Department of Defense and separate air service in the years to come. When the matter had come up for debate in the House, its proponents claimed it would save \$10,000,000 a year by elimination of duplication. The Navy's objections had not been raised in the House.¹³ Wadsworth insisted that there was no reason for the government to maintain two separate coast patrols, and, he stated, "it will stop the naval aviation from being used as a patrol for the forests."¹⁴ Senator Charles S. Thomas, in the course of the debate, took the opportunity to observe that the "ultimate solution of the problem will come when its [aircraft's] vast importance is duly appreciated and the conflict of authority and the duplication of administration indicate the necessity of an independent air service."

Senator New, whose bill for a separate air department had perished a few months earlier in the face of Senate opposition, set forth a basic problem of legislative jurisdiction which continued for many years to cloud the picture of legislative responsibility. He said: "I should like to ask the Secretary of War or the Secretary of the Navy, or any Senator here present, how you are going to refer a matter affecting the aviation service to any given committee of the Senate without in some degree trespassing upon the function of some particular department with which that committee is not in any way connected, and which it does not represent." Commenting on the fact that the Secretary of War had joined the Navy Secretary in opposition to the amendment, Senator New asserted that this was simply a case of "secretarial reciprocity."

13. Ibid., (April 5, 1920), p. 5691.

14. Ibid., p. 7524.

That is senatorial courtesy in the cabinet. . . . the Secretary of the Navy and those officers connected with the Navy who have testified on this subject are viewing it from the standpoint of the interests of the Navy. . . those who come to speak from the Army are representing the interests of the Army, and neither of them is speaking from the standpoint of the interests of aviation. 15

Discussing the problem of committee particularism, New observed that

Congress is perhaps as much to blame for the lack of progress in this country . . . as is anybody else . . . the only remedy . . . is by the appointment of a separate committee which can consider this thing independent of the interests of any particular branch of the service and to deal with it on its own merits. 16

Senator Miles Poindexter finally came to the point of charging that the amendment had its source in the activities and testimony of a certain Air Service leader, and he left no doubt that he meant General Mitchell. The issue was resolved, as usual, in favor of the wishes of the War and Navy Departments, on the motion of Senator Lodge to strike out the offending provision, and on a division the motion was agreed to.¹⁷

Officials of the War and Navy Departments preferred to be "let alone" to work out their own differences in such a matter as conflicts over coastal defense, rather than having the matter rigidly prescribed by Congress in law. Repeatedly, in testimony, Army and Navy spokesmen would refer to the official opinion that such matters could be easily and wisely worked out through the Joint Army and Navy Board, and the Aeronautical Board.¹⁸ The Army and Navy had, in fact,

15. Ibid., p. 7526.

16. Ibid., p. 7527.

17. Ibid., p. 7529.

18. For an official description of these boards, see, for example, War Department, Annual Reports, 1920, pp. 1455 ff.

worked out a joint agreement on the functions of their air services in 1920.¹⁹ But the inability to reach basic agreement as to command jurisdiction in "twilight zones" was to plague the Army and Navy for some time.

The issue of a separate air department, or some form of radical change in the national defense organization was, of course, not to die with the unsuccessful efforts of the air enthusiasts in Congress in 1919 and 1920. A number of legislators, particularly Representative Curry, continued to press for congressional action of a Department of Aeronautics, and each new session found bills to this end in the legislative hopper. The tests involving the bombing of naval vessels by Army and Navy aircraft in the summer of 1921 were fully exploited by General Mitchell and his supporters in Congress and the press. These bombing experiments have been described in an earlier chapter. They kept the issue of the role of military aircraft and the proper defense organization for the United States very much alive, although much of this attention was undoubtedly distracted by the proposals for armament limitation and the results of the Washington Conference.

In the meantime a new Chief of the Air Service had been named to succeed Major General Menoher in the person of Major General Mason M. Patrick. Patrick, a former Cavalry officer whose flying experience began after his fifty-ninth year, was a firm believer in the expansion of air power, but unlike Mitchell was a tactful person willing to compromise along the way. He was to have his hands full attempting to keep Mitchell within the bounds of military discipline but he did not muzzle Mitchell's attempts to convert Congress, the public, and

19. For a statement of this joint policy, see War Department, Annual Reports, "Report of the Chief of the Air Service," 1920, pp. 1464-1465.

those in the War and Navy Departments who would listen to his views of the role of air power in national defense. Patrick was also to be occupied fully in attempting to keep the Air Service up to its authorized strength in a period when Congress was becoming particularly economy-minded in the realm of national security. Indicative of his difficulties in this regard was his testimony before the President's Aircraft Board in 1925:

In the fiscal year 1923 I asked for \$26,000,000
the sum appropriated was \$12,700,000. For 1924 I asked,
in round numbers, for \$18,000,000, and the sum appro-
priated was \$12,426,000. 20

Patrick had evidently become discouraged about the future prospects of the Air Service in face of the year by year uncertainty of Congressional appropriations, and had proposed on February 7, 1923, a plan requested by the War Department, for a long-term development of aircraft. To study Patrick's plan the Secretary of War appointed a committee of officers, mostly from the General Staff, to make a study and full consideration of General Patrick's proposals. The committee was to come to be known as the Lassiter Board (from its chairman, Major General William Lassiter of the General Staff). The Lassiter Board's Report, outlining a ten-year development program for military aviation, although it was never adopted as such even though sponsored by a highly respectable War Department General Staff membership, was to be a major influence on the policy formulation in the years that immediately followed.

The problem before the Lassiter Board, as it was articulated by the board itself was to "determine the proper strength and organization of the Air Service, both in material [sic] and personnel, to meet

20. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 64.

peace and war requirements and the best means for the development of same."²¹ By 1923, after a few lean appropriation years, the War Department committee found the Army Air Service to be "in a very unfortunate and critical situation." And further,

Since the World War aviation has come to play an increasingly important part in military operations, but measures have not been taken in our country to keep step with this evolution. Due to the reduction in the Army, the personnel in the Air Service has been diminished.

These were the words over the signature of General Staff officers and not the rash words of Mitchell or his group of air radicals. Further, the report read that

For lack of business our aircraft industry is languishing and may disappear. . . . We cannot improvise an Air Service and yet it is indispensable to be strong in the air at the very outset of a war. 22

The Lassiter Board then proceeded to outline a ten-year aircraft production and personnel program to be recommended to the Congress. The board set the minimum materiel and personnel requirement at 4,000 officers, 25,000 enlisted men, and 2,500 airplanes, which could be expanded to a war-time mobilization force of 22,616 officers, 172,920 enlisted men, and 8,756 airplanes.²³

Thus the War Department had been informed, in 1923, by a committee of "respectable" and "experienced" officers that the United States Air Service was then in a "very unfortunate and critical situation." Just as serious a situation existed, also, in the nation's aircraft industry which they reported was "languishing" and could

21. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 1150. For extracts of the Lassiter Board Report, see ibid., pp. 1150-1154.

22. Ibid., p. 1152.

23. Ibid., pp. 1152-1153.

"disappear." The bottleneck seems to have come partly from an inability of the Army and Navy to agree upon a joint program for aircraft procurement and development to be submitted to Congress. A fundamental problem was, of course, a general retrenchment in expenditures for national defense in this period. The Lassiter Board had recommended that a joint Army and Navy program, worked out in the last analysis by the Joint Army and Navy Board "be submitted to Congress at its next session, accompanied by a special message from the President, setting forth its importance and embodying a recommendation that it be adopted."²⁴ This never came about,

A few years later Secretary of War Dwight Davis was to testify that "The Secretary of War and the Secretary of Navy were not in agreement on the Lassiter Board report, and it was based largely on that question that the Navy wanted a five-year program and the Army wanted a ten-year program."²⁵ This rift lasted for over three years.

Representative Randolph Perkins, later to be a leader in the House Select Committee's investigation of the air service, and an advocate of a Defense Department, told a House committee in 1926 that the chief reason nothing had been done to force an Army-Navy agreement on the Lassiter Board proposals was "that the country was not awakened to the importance of air power ... that those who had charge of the work of the defense of the country were unable to agree on many details."²⁶

The fate of the Lassiter Board report was later detailed by the chief of the General Staff's War Plans Division, Brigadier General Harry A. Smith. When the Lassiter Board report was presented to the

24. Ibid., p. 1154.

25. Ibid., p. 163.

26. Ibid., p. 332.

Secretary of War, it was approved by him "in principle," a term in bureaucratese meaning at most a vaguely qualified approval. Subsequently a naval air program, calling for a five-year development, and the Lassiter Board proposals for a ten-year plan were referred to the Joint Army and Navy Board.

The Joint Board was a product of the reorganization of the War Department in 1903. Following the World War this board was further reorganized and its membership was changed from personal to ex-officio. Its Army members were the Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff, and the Chief of the War Plans Division. Navy representatives were the naval counterparts of these officers. It was designed as the machinery for top-level coordination and cooperation of the Army and Navy in spheres of mutual jurisdiction or over-lapping missions. Since its reorganization in 1919, the board had by February, 1926, handled 264 cases, and of these there was only one in which the board could not come to an agreement. "That disagreement arose out of the means for carrying out the provisions of the Lassiter Board and the naval air program."²⁷

When the Navy's program and the Lassiter Board proposals were approved by the Joint Board, and sent back to the Secretaries of War and Navy, the Secretary of War, John W. Weeks, approved the Lassiter Board program, but he added that of all the money to be appropriated for aviation, about sixty per cent should go to the Army, and forty per cent to the Navy. Since this was not in fact an approval of the Joint Board recommendation, it was returned to that board, where a disagreement prevailed on this point of relative amounts of appropriations.²⁸

27. Testimony of Brig. Gen. Harry A. Smith in ibid., pp. 590-591.

28. This account was given as an "exact statement of what happened in regard to the Lassiter Board" by General Smith, in ibid., pp. 590-591.

When Army Chief of Staff Hines was asked by the Morrow Board, in 1925, why the War Department had done nothing to put into operation the recommendations of the Lassiter Board, he replied, "Because it costs money and we have not had the money." He added that another reason had been the inability of the Army and Navy members of the Joint Board to come to an agreement on expenditures for Army and Navy aviation. He reported that this issue was then still "at a deadlock."²⁹

Thus, in a period of over-all retrenchment of congressional appropriations for national defense, there was an essential conflict between the Army and Navy resulting from competition for the defense dollar as well as from rivalry over the mission of coastal defense. This persisted so that the long-range aircraft development programs were held up for several years. No such development programs as had evolved within the Army and Navy were allowed to reach Congress because of this fundamental disagreement. The fate of the Lassiter Board proposals, the manner in which the issue was bandied about between the Army and Navy with apparently no over-all decision from a higher authority³⁰ was to provide the proponents of a Department of Defense in 1925-26 with a major argument supporting their contentions. The inaction over the Lassiter Board's proposals was also to provide ammunition to the air radicals in their steady contention for the need of a separate air service and a Department of Defense.

While the Lassiter Board report is usually referred to as the ten-year development program that was never presented to or adopted by Congress, a careful reading of the report also shows a significant development in one of the central issues of the post-war controversy over the development of military air power. In a concluding section of the Lassiter report is found the statement:

29. Ibid., p. 98.

30. The President, of course, possesses the constitutional authority but did not use it.

An air force of bombardment or pursuit aviation and airships should be directly under headquarters for assignment to special and strategical missions, the accomplishment of which may be either in connection with the operation of ground troops or entirely independent of them. This force should be organized into large units, insuring great mobility and independence of action. 31

The acceptance of this principle by a group composed mostly of General Staff officers, in 1923, was indeed significant. It was a considerable revision of ideas of military aircraft utility set forth in the Menoher Board report of 1920. This early concept of a strategic air force was in essence the adoption by the Lassiter Board of General Mason M. Patrick's plan submitted to the War Department for the organization of the Air Service. And it seems likely that General Patrick had been influenced to a very great extent in the drawing up of this plan by his assistant chief, Brigadier General William Mitchell. But, as noted above, the Lassiter report, while it remained a basic War Department General Staff "study" document, was never presented to Congress in the form of a specific program recommendation. Nor had the revision by the Lassiter Board of doctrines regarding the missions of aircraft been promulgated as official War Department doctrines by the spring of 1926. This has been indicated in an earlier chapter. It was nonetheless to be a vital influence on the formulation of policy in the spring of 1926.

The years 1923 to 1925 were years in which there was apparently a certain amount of agreement to disagree between the top War and Navy Department officials, both civilian and military. The nation was obviously drifting further into the conviction "to study war no more." The pulpit, press and public platform rang with

31. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 1153. [Italics mine].

pacifist oratory and ecstatic praise of disarmament and peace. Yet the technological development of aircraft proceeded at rapid pace. Bombing tests against naval vessels by airplanes, the transcontinental flight of a plane from New York to San Diego on May 2-3, 1923, the round-the-world flight of the Army aviators in the summer of 1924, and the over-all increase in the speed, maneuverability, and range of aircraft in these years added fuel to the smoldering controversy over the proper organization of the national defense establishment. The technological revolution continued, and there were those outside the air service and Congress who saw in the development of aircraft a force calling for the unification of the national defense structures. Development of aviation as a new medium of warfare was, of course, not the only element producing advocates of a rearrangement of the nation's military structure. The concepts of "economy" and "efficiency," although often vaguely defined, were also potent factors.

Under a Senate Joint Resolution adopted on December 17, 1920 and amended May 5, 1923, a Joint Committee on Reorganization of the Administrative Branch of the Government was established, composed of Senators and Representatives and under the chairmanship of President Harding's representative, Walter F. Brown.

The reorganization plan recommended by this committee to the President called for "the coordination of the Military and Naval Establishments under a single cabinet officer, as the Department of National Defense."³² In submitting these recommendations to the committee in 1923, Harding had apologized for the delay which had been caused, he wrote, "by the difficulty encountered in reconciling the views of the various persons charged with the responsibility of

32. Senate, Reorganization of the Executive Departments, Document No. 128, p. 34.

administering the executive branch of the Government."³³ Even so, the Secretaries of War and Navy had stood in alliance against the proposal for a Department of Defense, just as they had done in the immediate post-war period and as they were to do in 1926 when there was a strong move in Congress favoring such a department.

Secretary of War John W. Weeks testified before the Joint Committee on Reorganization, "I could answer in a word what the War Department thinks," on the question of consolidation of War and Navy Departments.³⁴ That word was a blunt "No!" Much of the Secretary's testimony was designed to show how the army and Navy worked together through various boards to achieve cooperation and coordination. Work of the Joint Army and Navy Board, the Joint Planning Committee, the Joint Aeronautical Board, and the Local Joint Planning Committees was described as evidence of how the two services could function interdependently while maintaining the valuable status of independence.³⁵ Secretary Weeks asserted that "The interests of the services are so divergent with regard to national defense and so great in magnitude and distinct in mission that a separate administration is required for free and full development."³⁶ Weeks observed that whenever amateurs, laymen, and, by implication, congressmen, approach the problem of the organization for national defense they are inclined to the conclusion supporting a Department of Defense. But such an organization, Weeks declared, had "never been favored by men who have technical knowledge." He did not think it had ever been supported "by the armies or navies of any country and

33. Quoted in ibid., p. 33, President Harding to Walter F. Brown, February 13, 1923.

34. U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Reorganization of the Administrative Branch of Government, Hearings, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), p. 1.

35. See ibid., pp. 2 ff.

36. Ibid., p. 20.

certainly . . . not by our service people at this time." Weeks implied that the recommendations then before the committee had been made by those "not practically informed on military matters."³⁷

Weeks ended his testimony by stating that while a department of defense may be a good thing in theory, it was not, however, "a practical proposition." And he added: "Furthermore it has been tried and found wanting."³⁸ This was reference to the fact that the nation had originally started out with a War Department alone, and had soon found it to be necessary to establish a separate Navy. Weeks ended his testimony saying that the changes brought about through the proposed consolidation "would be trying."³⁹

The Secretary of the Navy, as already noted, was likewise opposed to the proposal. In fact, a comparison of the testimony of the two secretaries shows that in advance of their appearance before the committee a great amount of Army-Navy cooperation had taken place, as their testimony was very similar and made the same general points, often in identical language.⁴⁰ But the Navy raised some additional arguments, including that of questioning the constitutionality of setting up a Department of Defense. One of the underlying themes of the Navy's objections to the plan was expressed in the words of a report of the General Board on the subject: "The services afloat and ashore are quite dissimilar."⁴¹ Secretary Denby concluded, "To abolish the two departments and combine them into one would, in my opinion, gravely impair the morale of both the Army and the Navy, clog the administration of both, and so constitute a menace to the national defense."⁴²

37. Ibid., pp. 20-21.

38. Ibid., p. 21.

39. Ibid., p. 26.

40. See ibid., pp. 34-35 ff.

41. Report of General Board of the Navy, May 8, 1922, quoted in ibid., pp. 39-40.

42. Ibid., p. 35.

Despite President Harding's tacit support, this proposal was effectively blocked by the combined opposition of the Army and Navy. But similar proposals were to return again in the following year in several forms and were to stimulate a continuing debate over the proper aviation policy for the United States. There were those who continued to insist that the development of military aircraft, which recognized no land or sea boundaries, compelled the reorganization for national defense and a revision of doctrines of offensive and defensive warfare.

As 1925 approached the issue of national aviation policy had been rather thoroughly debated, studied and investigated. Proposals for organizational changes to incorporate military aircraft directly into the national defense machinery as an independent unit had produced counter-proposals, and had strengthened opinions and arguments for the status quo. Yet while the leadership in the War and Navy Departments seemed to be well entrenched in their positions of defense against any drastic change in their organizations or doctrines, there were forces working upon the areas of power within the national legislative body which were yet to offer serious resistance to the prevailing concepts of national security. Thousands of pages of testimony were yet to be taken as 1925 approached and the advocates of greater emphasis on the development of air power had made it clear that they had "only begun to fight."

To summarize the events from 1919 to 1925, the "background period" to the more immediate events leading to the congressional decision of 1926, it can be said that the period was one of constant ferment regarding the issue of a proper national defense organization and the role of aircraft in that organization. From the beginning the proposal for either a Defense Department or a separate air

department met the combined opposition of the War and Navy Departments and the leading military and civilian officials within those organizations. While the Army and Navy were agreed in their opposition to new proposals, there was nevertheless an element of discord between these two services regarding coastal defense and allocation of congressional appropriations for aircraft procurement. Thus, suggested long-range development programs for the two services were not even so much as proposed to Congress during these years.

A bill establishing a Department of Aeronautics had reached the floor of the Senate early in 1920, but the obvious opposition of Senators, as spokesmen for other departments, noticeably the Navy and Post Office Departments, caused the bill's sponsor to withdraw it after brief debate. With the post-war reorganization movement to produce more "economy and efficiency" in government, the idea of a Department of Defense gained significant support and was recommended to a reorganization committee by President Harding, but again the combined opposition of the Army and Navy foredoomed its adoption. It was, however, a rare session of the Congress between 1919 and 1925 that did not see various bills thrown into the legislative hopper calling for either a Department of Defense, a Department of Aeronautics, or some combined or other form intending basically to emphasize what many considered to be a revolutionary technique of warfare - use of aviation.

Meanwhile, as technological development in aircraft continued, and while many of the air radicals were making claims which exaggerated the capabilities of contemporary aircraft, aviation potentiality almost unanimously was conceded to be extraordinary. At the same time, in the face of the combined opposition of the most powerful elements in the Army and Navy, the Army air radicals tended to become more and

more separationist, and the antagonisms between some of the airmen and their adversaries on these issues of organization and doctrine became bitter. Mitchell had already recorded, as early as 1919, in a memorandum after a meeting with the Menoher Board, his conviction that it would be "impossible to develop an Air Service" under the control of the Army. Yet in 1919 Mitchell had not declared "war" on the War Department. He was still testifying before congressional committees in those early days after the war that he did not favor a Department of Defense, but merely independence for the air service.

Within the War Department there had been significant changes of opinion, if not of official policy during this period. The report of the Lassiter Board in 1923 had differed markedly with that of the Menoher Board three years earlier. In the Lassiter Board report could be found the doctrine of strategic air power as one of the important missions of aircraft, a significant idea to be found over the signatures of General Staff officers. The major bottleneck within the War Department as the years passed and the nation lapsed into a pacifist and nationalistic retrenchment seems to have been a lack of funds. The War Department apparently would have been happy to expand the nation's "air power" but was reluctant to do so at the expense of the older, better-established arms.

The pace of the controversy was to be stepped up, however, as the need for a long-range policy for aircraft became pressing and as the tactics of the air radicals became bolder and more explosive. The danger signs evident to those conscious of the problem of national aviation policy included a languishing aircraft industry which by this time was said to be "hanging by its eyelids" and uncertain of

markets. Other factors were a growing dissatisfaction of flying personnel in both the Army and Navy; the relatively low position of American military aircraft in comparison with other leading world powers; the rapidly advancing capabilities of aircraft; and a growing tendency in Congress to propose what seemed to most government leaders drastic solutions to these and other pressing aircraft problems.

A New York Times writer summed up the situation early in 1925 as follows:

Aeronautic progress in the United States has stopped. The commercial aircraft industry, of which so much was expected at the close of the World War, is almost at a standstill. This country ranks fifth or sixth in effective air power. Its military and naval planes are nearly all obsolete models. Of the army's 1,364 planes less than two dozen would be capable of meeting the combat planes of another world power on equal terms. At the same time the role of aircraft in warfare has grown tremendously more important. Battleships, cruisers, infantry and artillery will no longer enable a nation to win a war if it cannot secure and maintain the supremacy in the air. No enemy surface craft can safely approach within 150 miles of a coast adequately defended by air planes. 43

According to the Times writer, these facts above had been "admitted with more or less enthusiasm by all military and naval experts."⁴⁴

43. R. L. Duffus, "Conflict over Aircraft Policy," New York Times (February 15, 1925), Sec. 8, p. 7.

44. Idem.

CHAPTER XIV

A HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE INVESTIGATES AIRCRAFT

Whether or not it was widely admitted by "all military and naval experts" that the "role of aircraft has grown tremendously more important," nonetheless there was increasing concern and debate over America's standing as an air power.

This concern about the condition of American aeronautics, both civilian and military, had prompted Congress, in 1924, to establish a Select Committee on Inquiry into the Operations of the United States Air Service. This committee began its study in the fall of 1924, and its hearings were to give wide currency to the varying opinions on American air policies in 1924 and 1925. Other events, too, were to generate the aviation issue into a front-page subject in most of the nation's newspapers in the fall of 1925.

The hearings and report of this committee were to be the major influences in the decision-making process in 1926. This group, known generally as the Lampert Committee, was composed of nine congressmen, under the chairmanship of Florian H. Lampert of Wisconsin. It was organized under a resolution of March 24, 1924,¹ with the initial purpose of looking into charges of fraud or graft in governmental relations with the aircraft industry.² But the scope of the committee's investigation soon broadened into a consideration of all aspects of national aviation policy, and the committee's activities in later days tended to be centered upon the ideas and charges of

1. H.S. Res. 192, 67th Cong., 1st. Sess.

2. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee of Inquiry into Operations of the United States Air Services, Report, House Report No. 1653, 68th Cong., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 1. Hereafter cited as Lampert Committee, Report.

Brigadier General William Mitchell. The work of the committee went on for eleven months, with public hearings beginning on October 4, 1924 and continuing until March 2, 1925. The committee examined approximately 150 witnesses at hearings in Washington, New York, Pasadena and San Diego.³ The printed record of the investigation consists of six volumes, totalling almost 4,000 pages.⁴

There was much sentiment in the Lampert Committee apparently favorable to the general position of the air radicals. This is indicated in the questioning by committee members. The chief examiner of the committee was Representative Randolph Perkins, who later became an outspoken proponent of air power development.⁵ Another member of the committee was Representative Frank R. Reid, who was soon to become chief counsel to Mitchell in his court-martial trial. Further, the chairman of the committee, Florian Lampert, in the midst of the committee's deliberations, was quoted as stating:

. . . the fact seems to stand out that the conservatism in the General Staff of the army and the General Board of the navy has prevented expenditures for the acquirement of modern aircraft equipment in sufficient number to establish American supremacy in the air. Trifling with national security must stop. ⁶

This statement was found under a New York Times headline which read: "MITCHELL CHARGES VINDICATED."

There was apparently suspicion in the War Department, at least, that the Lampert Committee was developing into a vehicle for

3. Idem.

4. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Inquiry into the Operations of the United States Air Services, Hearing before Select Committee, 68th Cong., (6 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926). Hereafter cited as Lampert Committee, Hearings.

5. See, for example, his testimony before House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 329 ff.

6. New York Times, (March 12, 1925), p. 5.

the propagation of the Mitchell faith in air power.⁷ But events of 1925 were to produce other investigating groups whose findings promised to offset whatever advantage the air radicals may have gained in "capturing" the Lampert Committee.

The voluminous testimony before the Lampert Committee in 1924 and 1925 was for the most part a general repetition of that given almost five years earlier before congressional committees considering post-war reorganization of the military forces in general and the proposal for a Department of Aeronautics in particular. A good deal of the testimony concerned problems of the commercial aircraft industry. Meanwhile, as already noted, the idea of a Department of Defense had gained wide currency which necessitated further interpretation of defense policy and structure by military and civilian leaders of the War and Navy Departments and their aviation components. But on the whole officers of the Army General Staff and the Navy General Board stood in firm alliance against any drastic change in the national defense organization. General Mitchell reiterated his charges that the nation was becoming ever more defenseless in the air, that Army and Navy leadership was inherently opposed to and incapable of leadership in the development of air power, and that a reorganization of the national government's defense agencies was imperative.⁸

Mitchell's harsh criticism of his superiors and of the Navy Department leadership and doctrine in his several appearances before the Lampert Committee began to shorten the temper of War and Navy Department leadership. Not only was he damning outright Army and Navy

7. See R. Earl McClendon, The Question of Autonomy for the United States Air Arm, 1907-1945, Documentary Research Study (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University, 1950), note No. 18 on p. 114.

8. For examples of Mitchell's testimony, see Lampert Committee, Hearings, pp. 1888 ff, 1915 ff, 2777 ff.

leadership before a congressional committee because they were unwilling to follow his views on aviation, but he also attacked them on another front in the form of articles in popular magazines, such as the Saturday Evening Post.⁹ His superiors considered the time was at hand to call the enthusiastic general to order. This was attempted by Secretary of War Weeks in the form of calling upon Mitchell late in January 1925 to "prove" his extravagant charges regarding the state of the nation's military aviation. Mitchell was sent a detailed questionnaire containing excerpts of his testimony before the Lampert Committee which the War Department apparently considered extravagant or questionable. The official communication to the Chief of the Air Service stated that "The Secretary of War directs that you call on General Mitchell to submit without delay a statement of the facts which substantiated each assertion contained in the underscored portions of each extract of his testimony."¹⁰ With this, charges of "Suppression!," "Inquisition!," were heard in some areas of Congress and the press, and the issues of freedom of expression by military officers before congressional committees was thrust upon the scene. It was well known that Mitchell's term as Assistant Chief of the Air Service was expiring and that his reappointment by the President on the advice of the Secretary of War was in doubt. Mitchell's friends on the Lampert Committee and elsewhere were determined to make of this a major issue.

Mitchell nonetheless was required to furnish the information as directed by the Secretary of War. In so doing he set forth a

9. See, for example, his "Aeronautical Era," Saturday Evening Post, CXCVII (December 20, 1924), 3-4; and "Aircraft Dominate Seacraft," ibid., (January 24, 1925), 22-23.

10. The Adjutant General to the Chief of Air Service, January 29, 1925, copy in the Mitchell Papers.

long explanation of his background and experience which he felt justified his belief that he was one of the best qualified experts on the subject. He then presented a detailed defense of his remarks before the Lampert Committee. He prefaced this by declaring:

The evidence I gave before the Committee of Congress was in the form of my opinion expressed rather mildly. When an officer is called before a Committee of Congress to give his views . . . he should give them fully and without restraint. . . . all the organization that we have in this country really now is for the protection of vested interests against aviation. That is about the size of it. 11

In his reply to the Secretary of War, through the Chief of the Air Service, Mitchell took the opportunity to review his past frustrations and animosities. He explained the difficulties he encountered in carrying out the bombing tests of 1921. "In this whole proceeding, we were not defended by the War Department. . . . the Navy actually tried to prevent our sinking of the Ostfriesland," he complained.

He recounted a later experience.

When the bombing of the battleships, New Jersey and Virginia, was authorized by Congress independently of the War Department in 1923, four days before the operations were to take place, we were ordered to bomb from an altitude of ten thousand feet. At that time there was no heavy bombardment plane in the world that we knew of that had such a ceiling. . . . No practice ever had been held at such altitudes. . . . As it happened, we had just received super chargers.

Mitchell further censured the War Department, in his attempt to justify his harsh remarks before a congressional committee. He stated:

The general view of the War Department is to limit the ability and effect of aviation in a military way. Also

11. 2nd Endorsement, Brig. Gen. William Mitchell to Maj. Gen. Mason M. Patrick, February 5, 1925, copy in Mitchell Papers.

it does very little for developing aviation in a civil way or commercially, which is necessary in a well-balanced governmental organization. 12

As for the Navy Department, he said, in spite of "the most conclusive evidence" that Department "still appears before Congress and still testifies incorrectly or gives the impression that aircraft are of limited power against battleships."

The "stormy petrel" of the Air Service was critical of all governmental agencies dealing with aviation. The Weather Bureau, the Bureau of Standards, and the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics all came under his scorn. As for the latter organization, it had not confined itself to the technical aspects, he said, but had also "delved into the political side of the aviation question." For the National Advisory Committee Mitchell devised a new doctrine, which may be called "guilt by office space assignment." Referring to this group, he had concluded, "Its offices are in the Navy Building."

Mitchell concluded his explanation by stating that the views of his immediate Chief in the Air Service, Major General Patrick, were, "in the main, the same as mine, varying only in degree." Mitchell added that until his views regarding a basic reorganization of the national defense system were put into effect, "the air power of the United States will continue to flounder in the slough of aeronautical despond."¹³

In his indorsement of Mitchell's report, General Patrick concurred that much of the testimony given to Congress by Air Service opponents was "undoubtedly very inaccurate." He thought that "if uncontradicted, if accepted by the committee at its face value, it would have been confusing and decidedly misleading." Some of the

12. Idem.

13. Idem.

evidence, Patrick claimed, was "replete with inaccuracies," and disclosed "a great deal of ignorance of the facts on the part of some of the witnesses."¹⁴ But Patrick took issue with Mitchell's contention that witnesses had intentionally, or knowingly, falsified their testimony. While he could understand Mitchell's indignation at hearing "inaccurate" testimony, "this does not excuse a charge of possible bad faith on the part of the witnesses." Patrick then stated: "I therefore recommend that General Mitchell's attention be called to the language employed by him, and cautioned that hereafter under similar circumstances, if they arise, he confine himself to a statement of the facts . . . and refrain from any assault upon the integrity of reputable witnesses."¹⁵ This amounted to a defense of Mitchell by the Air Service Chief in the face of a War Department assault upon Mitchell's extravagant language. For in what amounted to no more than a hand-slapping, Mitchell was advised by his chief merely to watch his language.

In a higher echelon, the Secretary of War apparently had decided that Mitchell's service as a colonel in Texas would be of more value to the nation than his continuance as Assistant Chief of the Air Service. His reappointment was not recommended to the President. There were reports in Washington that both the War and Navy secretaries had issued an ultimatum to President Coolidge that he must choose between keeping them or Mitchell in office.¹⁶

Mitchell was not one to let pass unnoticed the issue of freedom of expression by officers before congressional committees.

14. Maj. Gen. Mason M. Patrick to the Adjutant-General, February 5 and March 11, 1925, typescript copy in Mitchell Papers.

15. Idem.

16. New York Times (February 19, 1925), p. 1. See also Levine, op. cit., p. 313.

He had written a letter to Chairman Lampert of the House Select Committee on February 28, 1925, stating:

I have been threatened with relief from my position on several occasions, both in the form of an official request and verbally. All these measures had a bearing on my advice as to the organization of aeronautics and the whole question of national defense. 17

In this letter Mitchell denied that he had seen, until only "a few days ago," a directive by the Secretary of War Weeks permitting freedom of speech by officers as long as they labelled it clearly "personal opinion." Mitchell told the committee chairman that "No matter what the War Department's policy on the subject may be, the fact remains that officers hesitate to express their full views on the organization of the Air Service and national defense before Congress." As always, Mitchell concluded by stating again that the Army and Navy were almost "helpless in the air," and that the nation possessed "No Air Force whatever."¹⁸

Mitchell well knew, however, that full freedom of expression and action were contrary to the customs and traditions of military organization. No doubt in this period he was turning over in his mind the best course of action to follow in his fight for air power. One suggestion in this regard came from a retired Army general, who wrote Mitchell:

. . . I have always understood that you had an independent income of your own. If this is the case, why spend your life as an army officer fighting those members of the Army and Navy who do not know the difference between an airplane and a jackass, - never having ridden either one. 19

17. William Mitchell to Chairman of House Select Committee, copy in Mitchell Papers.

18. Idem.

19. Milton F. Davis to William Mitchell, February 5, 1925, Mitchell Papers.

His correspondent went on to suggest that he resign from the Army and return to Wisconsin and seek Robert M. LaFollette's seat in the United States Senate.

The issue of the validity of the information given to congressional committees had been raised if not settled by Mitchell. Mitchell's open criticism of the nation's military leaders before Congress, and his repetition of this criticism in popular magazines finally led his superiors to the decision that he would not be reappointed as Assistant Chief. In a letter to the President from the Secretary of War explaining why Mitchell's reappointment was not being recommended, Weeks stated:

General Mitchell's whole course has been so lawless, so contrary to the building up of an efficient organization, so lacking in reasonable team work, so indicative of a personal desire for publicity at the expense of everyone with whom he is associated that his actions render him unfit for the high administrative position. . . . he has forfeited the good opinion of those who are familiar with the facts and who desire to promote the best interests of national defense. 20

Weeks pointed out that Mitchell's testimony before Congress had been misleading when he asserted that the Army had "but nineteen airplanes fit for war service, when as a matter of fact we have 829 airplanes of different classes actually in use." The Secretary of War further explained to the President that the War Department had a well-determined policy for aircraft development based on the report of the Lassiter Board, which program, he said, was the "goal" of the Army. "We have not reached that goal because of lack of appropriations to do so," he added. The Lassiter Board's recommendations had never actually been

20. John W. Weeks to President Coolidge, March 4, 1925, copy in Mitchell Papers. This letter was not made public until the last day of Mitchell's court-martial trial. See Levine, op. cit., p. 365.

presented to Congress, it will be recalled. Weeks dismissed the agitation for reorganization of the air service with the comment: "In my judgement the organization of the Air Service . . . is sound."²¹

On the question of whether officers of the Army were being muzzled in regard to giving their unorthodox opinions to Congress, Weeks assured the President that officers had been given instructions allowing them to speak freely if they made it clear they were not speaking for the War Department.

Mitchell's demotion to colonel and subsequent reassignment as air officer at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, was a significant event in that it tended to make him something of a martyr and, while he was still in the Army, his less responsible position could be interpreted as giving him more freedom of expression, which he was to use later with little discretion. He made it clear that he would continue to fight for the adoption of his views, and he lived up to this promise.

The issue of the reliability and accuracy of some congressional testimony had been raised for future committees of Congress to ponder. "That officers are embarrassed in testifying before congressional committees for fear of disciplinary measures, unfavorable considerations, or loss of opportunity for advancement, or other unfavorable action, was the subject of affirmative testimony which was not refuted by other evidence," wrote Representative Frank R. Reid in a concurring report of the Lampert Committee.²² "One is inclined to believe there does exist at least a feeling of embarrassment, particularly among junior officers, in giving testimony, and this

21. Weeks to Coolidge, March 4, 1925, loc. cit.

22. Lampert Committee, Report, pp. 34-35.

condition should not be permitted to continue," reported Reid.²³

The air around Washington in the late months of 1924 and the early months of 1925 had been filled with Army-Air Service-Navy controversy over the development and utility of aircraft. Few days passed during this period when newspaper columns did not contain reports of charges, counter-charges, testimony, interviews and editorials on the subject of the aviation issue. Brigadier General Mitchell was, to some, the center of much of this attention in the role of insubordinate antagonist to well-established authority, organization and doctrine, and to others his role was seen as that of a fighting, colorful leader of the movement to establish a modern, up-to-date, efficient and relatively inexpensive defense establishment, with aviation as the new "first line of defense."

The summer of 1925 was relatively calm as far as the aviation issue was concerned. Congress had considered a bill introduced by Representative Curry earlier in the year²⁴ but after extensive hearings by the House Military Affairs Committee no report was issued.²⁵ Curry was again advocating the establishment of a Department of Aeronautics. Meanwhile, the Lampert Committee had delayed issuance of a report resulting from its very extensive inquiry in order to permit committee and staff members to study and digest the thousands of pages of testimony.

Lieutenant Colonel James E. Fechet had succeeded Mitchell as Assistant Chief of the Air Service, and in the interim between his demotion and taking up of new duties in Texas Mitchell revised some of his articles, essays, and testimony for his book Winged Defense.²⁶

23. Idem.

24. H.R. 10147, 68th Cong., 2nd Sess.

25. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Air Service Unification, Hearings before Committee on Military Affairs on H.R. 10147 and 12285, 68th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).

26. This has been described in an earlier chapter.

"Openly and unremittingly Mitchell went about the business of crusading for air power as if his status had not been changed," wrote one of his biographers. "He left a trail of front-page newspaper headlines . . . in Washington and wherever he went," in the summer of 1925. ". . . headline writers and cartoonists had tagged Mitchell as a martyr to defense."²⁷ Mitchell was indeed the major catalyst of the public controversy over national defense policy in this period. It is possible that the struggle might have been waged for the most part behind the scenes had it not been for his temperament and self-appointment as a crusader for air power.

There were reports following Mitchell's demotion that he was considering the type of advice exemplified in the letter described above from a retired Army officer who had suggested he leave the Army and seek political office.²⁸ But at least one person had put the presidential bug in his ear regarding the elections of 1928, although no evidence has been found to indicate how this was received by Mitchell. He received a letter in May, 1925, which read in part:

Since our conversation the other day I have had several opportunities to discover certain things. . . . First: Our friend [Representative William A.] Oldfield has been doing a lot of talking about you and the next campaign and he seems to be thoroughly sold on the fact that you will be the nominee of the Democrats. . . . From your angle that is an excellent thing, because he is chairman of the National Democratic Congressional Committee. 29

This correspondent goes on to discuss the political situation in detail and then submitted a two-year detailed plan by which he offered to promote Mitchell's candidacy for the sum of \$25,000.

27. Levine, op. cit., pp. 320-321.

28. New York Times (March 12, 1925), p. 5.

29. D.C. Hodgkin to William Mitchell, May 20, 1925 in Mitchell Papers. Hodgkin was a member of the Democratic National Committee and had apparently been a promoter of John W. Davis' candidacy in 1924.

Mitchell was to give later consideration to a political career after his resignation from the Army in 1926³⁰ but for the time being he had decided to remain in the Army, and continued to propagandize for his air power views. It seems likely that his frustration over the stone-wall opposition to his views encountered in Washington Army and Navy circles was building up for an explosion. And whatever his motives, the opportunity was to offer itself for such an explosion at the end of the summer.

A few days after the publication of his book, Winged Defense, Mitchell began to receive news at his post near San Antonio, Texas, that a naval seaplane, commanded by Commander John Rodgers, was missing in the Pacific near the end of an attempted flight from San Francisco to Hawaii. This was on September 1. Shortly afterwards, on September 3, additional news was received of the loss of the Navy dirigible Shenandoah over the Ohio River valley. This airship was on a flight from Lakehurst, New Jersey to Minneapolis, Minnesota and was to visit a number of state fairs en route. The control compartment containing the airship commander and thirteen of the crew members had broken off in a storm and crashed, taking the lives of the occupants. The Secretary of the Navy immediately issued a statement

30. In a letter to his wife's father in 1926 Mitchell commented in some detail on the political situation. He wrote: "Betty, I think, would like to be in the Senate and I am not particularly adverse to it, although I would like it to come three or four years later. Of course, if one is going to strike, the time to strike is when the iron is hot.... things naturally incline me toward the Democratic Party. On the other hand, if the Democratic party again takes up the League of Nations or the World Court, I certainly cannot subscribe to it." He goes on to discuss the Wisconsin political situation, noting that a Democratic candidate for the Senate would have "the best chance ... since my father was in." From this letter, it is clear that he was exploring the possibilities of a political future, at least in his mind. Mitchell to Sidney T. Miller, April 15, 1926. Copy in Mitchell Papers.

on these two events, and in the course of his comments inserted the words that the Navy had, in view of these recent disasters, "come to the conclusion that the Atlantic and Pacific are still the greatest bulwarks against any air invasion of the United States."³¹ To Mitchell and other air enthusiasts this attempt to deprecate air power in conjunction with these naval disasters was "like waving a red flag at a bull."³² Mitchell received a number of requests³³ for a statement on these disasters from newspapers and wire services, and he at once saw this as an opportunity to compose a full and final indictment of the leaders of the nation's national defense organizations. He worked around the clock upon a statement which he was ready to issue to newsmen on the early morning of September 5, just two days after the destruction of the Shenandoah and her fourteen crew members.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mitchell's statement charged that the naval accidents were the direct result of "incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense by the war and navy departments."³⁴ Mitchell reiterated his now well-known charges against those in command in Washington. He deprecated the fact that air policy was being made and carried out by non-flying officers. Congress, further, was being

31. Quoted in New York Times (September 4, 1926), p. 1.

32. Levine, op. cit., p. 325.

33. See Mitchell Papers ca. 1925.

34. For the full text of this statement, see U.S. War Department, General Court-Martial Orders, No. 3 (Washington, January 26, 1926). This document contains also the official report of the court-martial proceedings against Mitchell. Mimeographed copies of Mitchell's Texas statement can also be found in Mitchell Papers. See also New York Times (September 6, 1926), p. 1.

furnished by Army and Navy personnel with "incomplete, misleading or false information about aeronautics, which either they knew to be false when given or was the result of such gross ignorance of the question that they should not be allowed to appear before a legislative body." In the course of the statement he charged that the Shenandoah had been going west on a "propaganda mission to offset the adverse publicity caused by the failures [of the Navy] in the Pacific and the Arctic." He repeated all the old charges against the Army and Navy bureaucrats, only this time with even less restraint than previously.³⁵

Mitchell is said to have handed out copies of his statement with the prediction that he would be under arrest within a few days to face a general court-martial.³⁶ Some months later he was quoted in the Cleveland Press as saying, "I showed the paper I had prepared on the subject to our military judge advocate before I issued it, and he told me I could certainly be tried for it."³⁷ It is evident that Mitchell had intended to make his own trial by the Army a great trial of the air power issue. Mitchell's statement and its subsequent publicity and the drama surrounding his impending court-martial were significant to the decisions made in Congress in 1926. His outburst in Texas in early September was, for example, a contributing factor to the creation by President Coolidge of an Aircraft Board to make recommendations regarding national aviation policy. The findings of this board were to prove to be the most important single influence upon the congressional policy-making in the last analysis, in the spring of 1926. It was to be the dominant source of the Air Corps Act of that year.

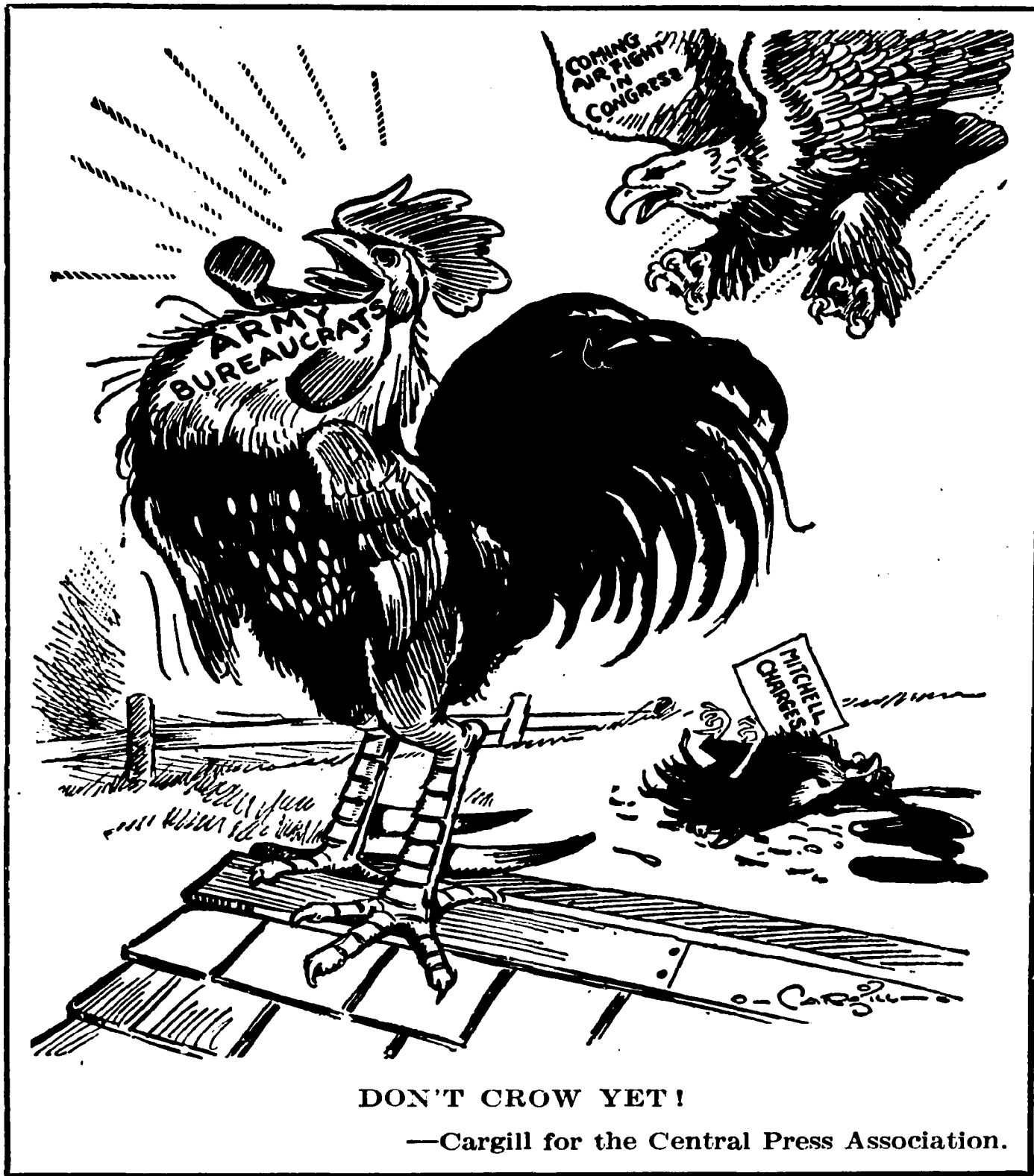
35. Idem.

36. New York Times (Sept. 6, 1926), p. 1; see also Levine, op. cit., p. 327.

37. Quoted in Levine, op. cit., p. 329.

Thus the fall and winter of 1925-26 held in store the reports of a Presidential Aircraft Board, the impending report of the Lampert Committee after its lengthy deliberations, and the Army trial of one of the most colorful and controversial of its officers, Colonel William Mitchell. This was the "howling baby,"³⁸ in the words of the Literary Digest, that was left on the congressional doorstep as Congress reconvened for its winter session of 1925-26. For the approval or disapproval of the various plans for a national defense system would have to be made, by constitutional authority, in the Congress, and more specifically, in the Committee on Military Affairs.

38. Literary Digest, LXXXVII (December 12, 1925), 10.



DON'T CROW YET!

—Cargill for the Central Press Association.

CHAPTER XV

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

"One of the liveliest babies ever laid on the Congressional doorstep was howling loudly when Congress came back home for its winter session, to find the aviation squabble again on its hands."¹

The World War and the years immediately following had produced a number of different schools of thought on the utility and value of aircraft as instruments of war. The controversy was intensified by the events of the early 1920s and by growing support in Congress for a radical change in the nation's military defense organization. In the closing months of 1925, this challenging issue of which policy Congress should adopt on military (and commercial) aviation had reached a boiling point. These months were to offer a significant report by a House of Representatives Select Committee, and even more significant hearing and report on aviation by a Presidential Aircraft Board, and one of the most famous military trials in American history, the court-martial of the leader of the air radicals, Colonel William Mitchell.

All of these events, and others, produced what the Literary Digest chose to call a "howling baby," the responsibility for which fell upon Congress. A disaster involving a Navy dirigible, the Shenandoah, had provoked the recently-demoted Colonel Mitchell to seize upon this event for the issuance of his most caustic criticism of his superiors in the national defense establishment. Mitchell had evidently decided at this time to try to force the issue in the

1. Literary Digest, XXXVII (December 12, 1925) 10.

form of his own court-martial, certain to follow, which he hoped would develop into a national trial of air power doctrine versus the more conservative military doctrine.

Under the torrent of criticism from Mitchell and its amplification by his supporters in wide sections of the nation's press, particularly the Hearst chain, the War and Navy Departments acted quickly to regain the initiative. Mitchell had charged ". . . incompetency, the criminal negligence, and the almost treasonable administration of our national defense by the Navy and War Departments."² The War Department could easily enough handle this flagrant breach of discipline through its regular procedure. Simultaneously, in order to meet the mounting criticism in Congress and the press, the Departments requested President Coolidge to appoint a special board to study the aircraft problem. The recommendations contained in the report of the President's Aircraft Board were to be the most important single source of influence on the congressional legislation which was to follow early the next year.

This chapter will describe in some detail the legislative background leading up to the Air Corps Act of 1926.³ This act was the climax of that acrimonious and intense struggle in the post-war years among the groups with varying views on the proper national defense organization for the United States. The legislative and administrative decisions which were to produce the 1926 Air Corps Act were, of course, the product of compromise among differing proposals. This study has already dealt with some of the background

2. September 5, 1925. For full text of Mitchell's Texas statement, see Mitchell Papers.

3. Public Law No. 446, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 2, 1926)

forces influencing the decisions of 1926, such as the World War experience with aircraft and subsequent interpretations of that experience, as well as the concepts of national security which seemed to guide those accountable for the administration of international affairs. This chapter will deal more specifically with the legislative setting in which the important decisions were reached.

As the sixty-ninth Congress convened for its first session on December 7, 1925, in the midst of the controversy over national aviation policy, members were immediately told by President Coolidge that "The general policy of our country is for disarmament."⁴ As for aviation policy, the President's annual message contained the advice that "No radical change in organization of the [air] service seems necessary." Further, Coolidge stated that "Aviation is of great importance both for national defense and commercial development," and that "We must have an air strength worthy of America." As an implicit answer to the air radicals who had been proclaiming loudly that the nation had no air power, Coolidge bluntly advised: "Our country is not behind in this art. It has made records for speed and for the excellence of its planes."⁵

Coolidge recommended for congressional consideration the recently completed report of the Aircraft Board he had appointed in September which, under the chairmanship of Dwight W. Morrow, had made a study of "the best means of developing and applying aircraft in national defense."⁶ Coolidge felt that:

4. President's Annual Message to Congress, Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., LXVII (December 7, 1925), 459.

5. Ibid., p. 461.

6. Calvin Coolidge to Secretaries of War and Navy, September 12, 1925, in Morrow Board, Report, p. 1.

The report of the Air Board ought to be reassuring to the country, gratifying to the service, and satisfactory to the Congress. It is thoroughly complete and represents the mature thought of the best talent in the country.

The President went on to recommend some of the specific changes called for in the Morrow Board report, such as additional assistant secretaries for air, additional brigadier generals in the Air Service, and temporary rank for flying officers. But after citing these and other aviation proposals, he again reminded the Congress that he was "thoroughly opposed to instigating or participating in a policy of competitive armaments."⁷ It was also clear from his message that tax reduction was a primary aim of his program, and the implication was that the country could not afford both a tax reduction and expanded aerial armaments.

The Morrow Board

The President had appointed an aircraft board to consider national aviation policy shortly after the destruction of the naval airship Shenandoah and Colonel Mitchell's outburst of criticism of Army and Navy leadership. The naming of this board has been said to have been directly precipitated by the airship tragedy and Mitchell's widely publicized statement.⁸ Others have held that the Board was named at the instigation of the War and Navy Departments to head off a forthcoming Lampert Committee report expected to be at variance with War and Navy views.⁹ The President publicly announced that he

7. President's Annual Message, 1925, loc. cit., p. 461.

8. Interview, April 17, 1953, with Representative Carl Vinson, sometime chairman of the House Naval Affairs and Armed Services Committee and member of the Morrow Board.

9. See R. Earl McClendon, The Question of Autonomy for the United States Air Arm, 1907-1945, p. 122.

had appointed the board after having received a joint letter from the Secretaries of War and the Navy,¹⁰ but mentioned that he had had such an enterprise in mind in the previous spring.¹¹ There were indications in the press that Navy Secretary Wilbur did not favor further investigation of the aircraft situation. Wilbur was quoted as considering it "Wholly unnecessary" to enter into another "long drawn-out and expensive" inquiry, dealing with the same issues as had the recently-held House Select (Lampert) Committee and Navy General Board inquiries. Secretary of War Davis was reported as favoring another inquiry by a "competent and impartial agency."¹² Whatever transpired behind the scenes, it seems likely that the combination of events in early September had prompted the President to hastily assent to the public request of Dwight W. Davis, who had succeeded John W. Weeks as Secretary of War, and Secretary of the Navy Wilbur.¹³ Coolidge announced the membership of the board on September 12, 1925: Major General James G. Harbord, retired Army officer; Rear Admiral Frank W. Fletcher, retired, of the Navy; Dwight W. Morrow, a college friend of Coolidge, a lawyer and a partner in the J.P. Morgan banking firm; Howard E. Coffin, an automotive and aeronautical engineer who had been active in World War I aircraft production; Senator Hiram Bingham, Republican member of the Committee on Military Affairs, a member of the war-time Army Air Service and

10. Morrow Board, Report, p. 1.

11. See ibid., Coolidge to Secretaries of War and Navy, p. 1.

12. New York Times (September 11, 1925), p. 1.

13. In his memoirs, Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, takes credit for suggesting the appointment of a national air board with Morrow as chairman. See his Memoirs, The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-33, -II (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 132-33. But Hiram Bingham suggests that Hoover was, in this respect, "inaccurate." Interview with Bingham, April 15, 1953.

the only aviation pilot on the Board; Representative Carl Vinson, Democratic member of the Committee on Naval Affairs; Representative James S. Parker, Republican, Chairman of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce; Judge Arthur C. Denison, of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals; and William F. Durand of Stanford University, president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and member of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics.

In naming this group Coolidge had designated no chairman. Hiram Bingham takes credit for suggesting Morrow as chairman, having obtained prior approval of Coolidge. Bingham recalls that Major General Harbord was somewhat disgruntled at not being designated as chairman since his name had been first on the list of appointees. Bingham suggests in retrospect that Morrow's appointment had been a very wise move because Morrow was not identified with any of the interested groups in the aviation controversy. Also, his designation as chairman was designed to gain respect for the board's findings, especially in the "eastern press," much of which had tended to be friendly to at least some of Mitchell's contentions at this time.¹⁴

It is not known how the President came to chose the members of the Morrow Board. Morrow himself is said to have learned of his appointment, somewhat to his surprise, in a newspaper announcement. According to Morrow's biographer, "His first inclination was to refuse this service on the ground that he possessed no knowledge of aviation."¹⁵ But his appointment by Coolidge was not a complete surprise. Earlier in the year, in March, he had received a note from the President stating, "I have in mind that I may like to have you look into the subject of airplanes for me."¹⁶ This communication

14. Interview with Hiram Bingham, April 15, 1953.

15. Harold Nicholson, Dwight Morrow, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1935), p. 281.

16. Quoted in ibid., p. 281.

from Coolidge had been characteristically curt, and Morrow had heard no more of the matter until he opened his Sunday newspaper on September 13. Yet Morrow and all the other named members accepted and public hearings before the board commenced on September 21.

A majority of the board was not likely to look favorably upon the views of the air radicals in the Army and in Congress, although Morrow later claimed before a House Committee, referring to the membership of his board, "I think the committee, on the whole, started with some prejudice in favor of the air point of view."¹⁷ An analysis of the committee's membership and questioning of witnesses by its members indicates however that there were no more than one or two persons on the board who were in fact "air-minded" to a degree that would be acceptable to the air radicals. Morrow had cited as an example Hiram Bingham, who was largely responsible for calling witnesses to present the point of view of the air radicals. But while an air enthusiast, Bingham at the time accepted few of Mitchell's precepts and could not be listed as friendly to Mitchell or his point of view. Bingham had harshly criticized Mitchell for his inflammatory Texas statement, saying that Mitchell's charges were exaggerated and unfair to the War and Navy Departments.¹⁸ He was opposed also to one of the central points of the issue, the establishment of a Department of National Defense.¹⁹ The person on the Morrow Board perhaps most friendly to the views of the air radicals was Howard Coffin, who had been a member of the Crowell Commission which had recommended a separate Department of Aeronautics in 1919.

17. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 825-826.

18. New York Times (September 7, 1925), p. 4.

19. Interview with Hiram Bingham, April 15, 1953.

Morrow's biographer suggests that Morrow conceived that one of the purposes of the board, in its hearings, was "to render clear to the public that the allegations of Colonel Mitchell were grossly exaggerated." Having done this, the intention was to proceed "with great skill to deal with the Colonel's minor grievances."²⁰

Morrow later explained in more detail what he had meant when he told a House Committee that, in the beginning, his board started with a prejudice "in favor of the air point of view." He stated:

Most that the press contained was criticism of the high command. About the only side that one had who had not had the advantage of getting the other side here, would be the side of the airmen. . . . I think we saw the other side. 21

Again, it is apparent that Morrow's statement claiming an early prejudice on the part of the board in favor of the air point of view was somewhat inaccurate.

For one, Representative John J. McSwain, an ardent supporter of Mitchell and a warm advocate of a Department of National Defense, apparently suspected the Morrow Board of being set up to take the initiative away from Mitchell and from some of the findings of the Lampert Committee. He asked Morrow, in the House Military Committee hearing:

Do you know why it was that the President ignored this committee, which is charged with the general policy of National defense, in the selection of the personnel of the committee of which you have the honor to be chairman?

Morrow: You will have to ask him that. . . .

McSwain: Do you know how he managed to pick the personnel of the committee at all?

Morrow: I do not. I think it would be fair to say, Mr. McSwain, that a member of the Military Affairs Committee in the Senate and of the Naval Committee in the House were appointed on the board. 22

20. Nicholson, op. cit., p. 284.

21. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 863.

22. Idem.

McSwain, obviously mistrustful of the Morrow Board and somewhat antagonistic to its findings, pressed his questioning on this same point when Brigadier General Hugh Drum, Assistant Chief of Staff appeared before the House Military Committee:

McSwain: Do you not believe, just as a matter of good common sense, that the findings of the Morrow Board were approved before the Morrow Board ever assembled? Were those findings not approved as soon as it was agreed as to who would go on the board, as soon as it was found that such and such men were going to constitute the Morrow Board? . . .

Drum: I know this. . . . I worked night and day for about three weeks getting together some arguments to present to combat certain views of members of the Morrow Board when I appeared as a witness.

McSwain: . . . coming right down to the plain truth of it, did the War Department approve this report and tell the President that it was all right, or did the President tell the War Department it was all right?

Drum: I do not know.

McSwain: You do know, General, do you not?

Drum: No, sir; I do not. 23

McSwain questioned a number of witnesses similarly in the House hearings held in early 1926, if only to establish in the record his belief that the Morrow Board's intention was to give respectability and authority to the War and Navy Department policy on the questions of national defense policy at issue.

Morrow's statement that the press had been generally critical of the Washington military and naval command, and inclined to support Mitchell in the beginning of the furor raised over Mitchell's Texas statement, is significant. It was quite apparent that in the fall of 1925 the President, and Secretaries of War and the Navy badly needed

23. Ibid., p. 741.

to regain the initiative or risk seeing their policies and doctrines modified or abandoned in the congressional committees.

President Coolidge later took the occasion of a speech before the American Legion Convention on October 6, 1925, to lash out at Army officers trying to influence the government by inflaming the popular mind. Coolidge reiterated his belief in further disarmament, declaring:

Our people have had all the war, all the taxation and all the military service that they want. They have therefore wished to emphasize their attachment to our ancient policy of peace. They have insisted upon economy. 24

The President observed that the nation had no enemies in the world, and for this reason the nation had no need of maintaining large military forces. This was a decision of civil authority under our system of constitutional government for, as he reminded the audience, "Our forefathers had seen so much of militarism and suffered so much from it that they desired to banish it forever." Coolidge then stated:

It is for this reason that any organization of men in the military service bent on inflaming the public mind for the purpose of forcing Government action through the pressure of public opinion is an exceedingly dangerous undertaking and precedent. This is so whatever form it might take, whether it be for the purpose of influencing the Executive, the Legislature or the heads of departments. . . . Whenever the military power starts dictating to the civil authority, by whatsoever means adopted, the liberties of the country are beginning to end. National defense should at all times be supported, but any form of militarism should be resisted. 25

24. Full text in New York Times (October 7, 1925), p. 2.

25. Idem.

Clearly in defiance of the President's implied denunciation of his activities, Mitchell among others sent his own message to the Legion convention, urging Legionnaires to endorse his plan for a Department of Defense and expanded air power.²⁶ His telegram to this effect was read to the convention on the day following the President's address.

Mitchell's earlier Texas outburst against the high command in Washington had caught the headlines of most of the nation's newspapers if not their editorial support. Particularly strong backing came from the newspapers of the William Randolph Hearst chain, which did not often bother to confine its editorializing to the editorial page. In a prominently featured first page editorial, carried in the nation-wide Hearst chain, Hearst himself wrote:

The President, according to the newspapers, intends to have Mitchell's charges of the utter incompetence of the army and navy bureaucrats regarding aviation investigated.

It is to be hoped that the President will not permit Mitchell to be investigated again and condemned again in advance of the investigation by the very army and navy chiefs whom Mitchell accuses of ignorance, incompetence, and criminal carelessness.

There is really no need for an investigation to prove the truth of Mitchell's statements in these respects. 27

But the editorial opinion in other newspapers varies from this type of support for Mitchell's charges to outright denunciation of his methods and views. A survey of the press in all sections of the country in the several weeks following Mitchell's statement was made by the Navy. This survey indicated there were twenty-two Hearst

26. Ibid., p. 1.

27. Chicago Herald Examiner (September 9, 1925), p. 1. Clipping in Mitchell Papers.

papers and twenty-eight others which could be classified, from their editorial statements, as favoring Mitchell's actions and also in favor of a "United Air Force." In addition thirty-six newspapers were classified as "impartial" and demanding a full investigation of the charges. Fifty-two additional papers were listed as taking exception to Mitchell's methods but demanding an investigation of national aviation policy. Finally, forty-six papers were listed as denouncing Mitchell's methods outright and opposing his views in support of the established authorities in Washington.²⁸

A popular aviation magazine known to be friendly to Mitchell and to the idea of expansion of United States air power, in an editorial the following month praised the President's selection of the Morrow Board in the following words:

President Coolidge's action in appointing a Commission to study the Government's Air Service at this time proves first that we have a commander-in-chief fully able to take command in the fullest sense of the word when necessity requires it, and second, he realizes that the aeronautical situation has reached the point where it requires his attention. . . .

Colonel Mitchell will now have an opportunity to prove his charges that everything is wrong in the Army and Navy. . . . If he fails it will be his fault

The Commission should do much toward deciding the real relation of air defense to military and naval defense, and it should show whether the importance of aircraft really is equal to that of either military or naval defense, or if it has surpassed them. 29

28. United States Navy, Information Section, Office of Naval Intelligence, September 26, 1925. Mimeographed copy in Mitchell Papers. No indication is given of the methods of content analysis of these newspapers, nor of the method of selection. The list included, however, the major newspapers in all sections of the United States.

29. Aero Digest, VII (October, 1925), 537.

Mitchell himself, upon learning of the Morrow Board's appointment, gave his approval and blessing. "The personnel of the board is a surety that the study will be painstaking and fair," he was quoted as saying.³⁰ In an editorial also approving of the President's choice of a board to investigate aviation, the New York Times observed:

When even Colonel Mitchell admits that the personnel is such as to insure a painstaking and fair investigation, no serious objections will be raised by others. . . . In advocating this sort of inquiry, President Coolidge has done a thing both wise in itself and politically adroit. He has forestalled criticism, at the same time that he has prevented rash and inconsiderate action. Even hot-headed Congressmen, one of whom is ready with a bill to make Colonel Mitchell a Major General and place him in supreme command of all branches of the aviation service, will be disposed to wait for the results of the thorough and scientific investigation which Mr. Coolidge desires to have made. 31

President Coolidge doubtless realized that Mitchell's harsh criticism of the War and Navy Departments was an implicit criticism of his own administration. And such criticism which followed headline-catching events such as the Shenandoah disaster and the missing naval flyers in the Pacific were capable of producing some political embarrassment to the Republican leadership. Representative William Oldfield, chairman of the Democratic Congressional campaign committee, had been quick to seize upon this aviation controversy for partisan use. In a speech to Minnesota party leaders in Minneapolis on September 10, he had asserted that Colonel Mitchell would have "the full backing of the Democratic strength in Congress in his crusade against the present administration of the country's air

30. Associated Press, September 12, 1925, San Antonio Texas, in New York Times (September 13, 1925), p. 28.

31. New York Times (September 14, 1925), p. 18.

forces."³² Oldfield promised a "real investigation" by the Congress, asserting that Mitchell had been demoted because he had criticized incompetence in the Washington high command.

But the appointment of the Morrow Board, which had received almost universal acclaim, was to forestall intense partisan use of the aircraft issue, and it was only after its report had been rendered did it come under the attack of the air radicals and their supporters.³³

The Morrow Board commenced hearings on September 21, 1925 and in the following three and one-half weeks held frequent sessions, often meeting morning, afternoon and evenings.³⁴ The general plan of the hearings was to divide the inquiry into four general parts. First there was a consideration of Army air policy, including official War Department views and those of critics of official policy. Next there was a consideration of naval aviation policy, followed by critics of the Navy's system. Thirdly, there was a consideration of other governmental agencies dealing with aviation such as the Post Office and Commerce Departments. Finally, the plan was to hear opinions on the state of the aviation industry and its relation to the problems of national defense. This plan was followed with slight modification because of the availability of witnesses. In all, the Morrow Board heard ninety-nine witnesses, of whom more than half

32. New York Times (September 11, 1925), p. 8.

33. Two protests were noted in the press regarding Howard Coffin's membership on the board. Coffin was well known to have favored a separate air department, but the attacks came from air enthusiasts, so the nature of the objections was not made clear in the press reports. Some may have attributed to Coffin part of the responsibility for the "failure" of the aircraft program during the war. See New York Times (September 16, 1925), p. 27; and (September 18, 1925), pp. 1, 6.

34. For a contemporary article on the Morrow Board, see Howard Mingos, "The Nation Seeks the Truth about Aviation," New York Times (September 27, 1925), Section 8, p. 5.

were said to be "actual flying men." The report stated: "We designedly gave the greater portion of the time to hearing those men who had actual air experience."³⁵

The Morrow Board Hearings, which are printed in 1,768 pages, (including the Index), form one of the most complete and valuable sources of information, fact and opinion available on the question of the role and status of aviation in 1925.³⁶ The views of the representatives of those groups concerned, as set forth before the Morrow Board, have been summarized in an earlier chapter. Much of the testimony was in conflict, in keeping with the opinions of the various interested groups, particularly on the question of organization and doctrine regarding the role of air power in national defense. Even if Morrow's biographer is correct in asserting that the main purpose of the board was to put Mitchell in what the War and Navy Departments considered to be "his place," nonetheless the board patiently heard witnesses from all sides of the controversy.

Colonel Mitchell, who had arrived in Washington a few days after the Morrow hearings got underway to await Army court-martial proceedings resulting from his Texas statement, was expected to be a star witness before the Morrow Board. Wearing a broad sombrero, he had been met at the Union Station in Washington by an enthusiastic crowd of supporters, mostly from American Legion posts, and was referred to in the press as "the central figure in the storm that is raging in aviation circles."³⁷

Mitchell's testimony before the Morrow Board had been eagerly awaited by his supporters and admirers, and by newsmen anxious to capitalize on the news value of conflict between leading figures in

35. Morrow Board, Report, p. 2.

36. Morrow Board, Hearings.

37. New York Times (September 26, 1925), p. 1.

a major controversy. Newsmen were said to have prepared to keep the "wires open" in order that they might file the Colonel's testimony into the nationwide news networks.³⁸ But Dwight Morrow had conceived of a "plan" for handling Mitchell's testimony, which was to allow Mitchell to make his statement without interruption from board members, thus minimizing the clash of personalities and opinions. Mitchell had, perhaps unknowingly, cooperated with this scheme by coming prepared only to give testimony lifted almost in toto from his book, Winged Defense. Mitchell had apparently counted upon questions being raised in the course of his testimony, but the Morrow "plan" precluded this.³⁹ Mitchell appeared before the board on September 29, arriving at the hearing room with a large globe of the world and with the request that he be placed under oath before giving his testimony, "so that it will give more force to it."⁴⁰ This request was refused, the committee having previously sworn no other witness, and Mitchell was allowed to proceed with his statement, with almost no interruptions other than brief recesses, until late in the afternoon. Morrow's plan was obviously working, for Mitchell stated, after four hours of testimony following the noon recess, "I am getting pretty tired of reading all this stuff."⁴¹ Earlier in the day he already had inquired, "Are you gentlemen of the board getting tired of all this stuff?"⁴² Much to the disappointment of many of Mitchell's supporters and to many members of the press, the Morrow plan of dealing with Mitchell

38. Interview with Hiram Bingham, April 15, 1953.

39. See Nicholson, op. cit., pp. 284-285; this plan of Morrow's was corroborated in an interview with Hiram Bingham.

40. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 495. For Mitchell's testimony in full, see ibid., pp. 496-633.

41. Ibid., p. 558.

42. Ibid., p. 539.

had been successful, and Mitchell was trapped into his own filibuster. There was considerable questioning of him by members of the board on the following morning, but Chairman Morrow allowed no controversy to erupt. Mitchell's testimony was for the most part a re-reading of his book, Winged Defense, and the submission into the record of various documents supporting his major contentions. Writing many years later, General H.H. Arnold observed of the Morrow Board: "American air power received little benefit from the formation of this body, and very little from Billy Mitchell's appearance before it."⁴³

Hearings before the Morrow Board continued until October 16, and between that date and November 30, when its report was issued, the board was engaged in executive sessions for the consideration and interpretation of data which were before them and for the writing of the report.

Since the recommendations on aviation policy in the Morrow Board report are the most important single direct influence on the policy that was adopted by Congress in the following year, it is necessary to summarize here the board's findings, which were reported unanimously. As to this unanimity, the report stated, "We do not minimize the difficulties which we have experienced in reaching such a result."⁴⁴

In reaching its conclusions the board had used other sources of information in addition to the testimony of witnesses. Also utilized were the testimony heard by the House Committee on Military Affairs on the Curry Bill (H.R. 10147); the hearings of the Lampert Committee, which was soon to issue its own report; and the various

43. H.H. Arnold, op. cit., p. 119.

44. Morrow Board, Report, p. 29.

other hearings, reports, and studies which had been made of the aviation question since the World War.⁴⁵

The Morrow report emphasized the "great conflict in the testimony" given to the committee, such as on the question of how many usable planes the United States possesses; the effects of anti-aircraft fire in defense against aircraft; the relative position of the aircraft industry and potential commercial use of aircraft; the relative rank of the United States in the number of military aircraft possessed; the relative vulnerability of the United States to attack by foreign aircraft; and many other moot questions.⁴⁶

It was this "confusion of opinion" which increased the difficulty of reaching a decision on policy recommendations. But the board was certain of one thing: that aviation was a "great new factor" in the lives of men. The difficulty was in the integration of this factor into the existing organizations and doctrines of war. The promotion of aviation by enthusiasts had stirred up a bitter controversy between the "newer and older arms" of the Army. The board recognized that this had developed into a conflict "between the old and the new, emphasized by the sharp adjustments required in the period immediately following a great war."⁴⁷

On the specific questions before the board, the report contained some specific answers. On the question of the relationship between government military and civilian aviation services it concluded that they should remain "distinctly separate."⁴⁸ This conclusion ruled out a Department of Aeronautics. At the same time, the report rejected the idea that potent air power would, by serving as

45. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

46. Ibid., p. 3.

47. Ibid., p. 5.

48. Ibid., p. 6.

a deterrent to war, best promote world peace. In the same vein it also rejected the theory that strategic bombing was effective in winning a war. In a significant phrase, the report read: "The real road to peace rests not upon more elaborate preparations to impress wills but rather upon a more earnest disposition to accommodate wills."⁴⁹ Further, "This new weapon, with its long range of power not only for defense but also for offence, is subject to the psychological rules which govern all armament. Armaments beget armaments."⁵⁰ The temper of the times is here revealed, indicating significant motivations affecting the board's conclusions.

The report stressed the importance of commercial aviation, not only to the economic progress of the nation, but as the backbone of a national defense emergency. Government aids to commercial aircraft were suggested as a basic requirement.

As for military air policy, the board found that:

Our national policy calls for the establishment of the air strength of our Army primarily as an agency of defense. Protected, as the United States is, by broad oceans from possible enemies, the evidence submitted in our hearings gives complete ground for the conclusion that there is no present reason for apprehension of any invasion from overseas directly by way of the air; nor indeed is there any apparent probability of such an invasion in any future which can be foreseen. 51

Implicit here was a conception of the Navy as the first line of defense, and a preoccupation with the essentially defensive needs of the nation's military organization. These indeed were highly significant assumptions which were to plague those who continued to fight for strategic air power, essentially an offensive force in the strict

49. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

50. Morrow Board, Report, p. 7.

51. Ibid., p. 10.

meaning of the term, well into the 1930s, and in a different setting in the post-War II period.

The report emphasized its conclusion that the United States was in no danger of attack by air from any potential enemy "in any future which scientific thought can foresee." The report added that "the fear of such an attack is without reason."⁵²

Admitting that there was some strength in the argument that a unification of the armed services would eliminate duplication of effort and overlapping of functions, the board nonetheless concluded that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages of the proposal for the creation of a Department of Defense. Using a now-familiar argument, it was said that a Department of Defense organization would call for the creation of a "super general staff." The board felt that they saw merit in the arguments by the Army and Navy that each of them is "entitled to a member of the Cabinet in order that its special views may be properly presented to the President and to the Congress," and that on the other hand "It is difficult to see how any such super-organization would make for economy in time of peace or efficiency in time of war."⁵³ In a like manner the report argued in some detail against the idea of a separate department for air, coordinate with the Army and Navy departments. The basic contention here was that presented most frequently by the military leaders: "Modern military and naval operations can not be effectively conducted without such services acting as integral parts of a single command."⁵⁴ The board accepted the conclusions of the leaders of the Army and Navy in this regard. As for air power specifically, the report stated:

52. Ibid., p. 12.

53. Ibid., p. 13.

54. Ibid., p. 14.

We do not consider that air power, as an arm of the national defense, has yet demonstrated its value - certainly not in a country situated as ours - for independent operations of such a character as to justify the organization of a separate department. We believe that such independent missions as it is capable of can be better carried out under the high command of the Army or Navy, as the case may be. 55

Following these general observations and conclusions in which the Morrow Board reached no conclusions basically at variance with the "official line" of the War and Navy Departments, the report had specific recommendations to make regarding future policy. These recommendations were subdivided to deal with the Army, the Navy, and the aviation industry. Since this study deals principally with Army aviation, major attention will be directed to the board's findings regarding the Army Air Service.

The air radicals could find some solace in this part of the report, for here the Morrow Board endorsed the evolving doctrine of an independent mission for air power as one of the two major functions of the Army's Air Service. "It has two major functions - one to render service in an auxiliary role in time of war to other combatant branches of the Army and the other that of an air force operating alone on a separate mission."⁵⁶ No elaboration was given here defining this separate mission. As for the status in 1925 of the Air Service, the report indicated the board's satisfaction that:

Our strength of air arm in proportion to general military establishment compares favorably with that of any other power. Geographical position with reference to other nations is bound to affect necessary air strength as it affects the rest of the Army. 57

55. Idem.

56. Ibid., p. 15.

57. Ibid., p. 16.

Such a favorable comparison with other nations was also given for the personnel and equipment of the Air Service, although the board recognized the existence of personnel problems which they attributed chiefly to dissatisfactions with the rank and promotion system for Air Service officers.⁵⁸

The following specific recommendations for changes in organization and policy were suggested for the Air Service:

1. Change of name from Air Service to Air Corps. This was suggested in order to "avoid confusion" and because "the distinction between service rendered by air troops in their auxiliary role and that of an air force acting alone on a separate mission is important."⁵⁹ Air "Service" therefore was considered no longer proper nomenclature for an organization with an independent combat mission.
2. An additional Assistant Secretary of War for Air should be created by Congress, with such duties as he may be assigned by the Secretary of War. Similar recommendations were made for the Navy and Commerce Departments.
3. Special representation for the Air Service on the General Staff was suggested, by the creation of administrative order of special air sections in the five major divisions of the General Staff. This was required the board believed, because few flying officers in the youthful air service had had the time to qualify for General Staff service. And although this proposal violated the general rule that no General Staff officer be considered as representing a particular service, the board felt that "the good to be gained . . . justified departure from the general rule."⁶⁰
4. It was suggested that Congress provide for two additional brigadier generals in the Air Service, one for procurement duties and the other for supervision of training.
5. Congress should provide for temporary rank for flying air officers when assigned to a position calling for a higher rank than they would ordinarily hold on the promotion list.

58. Ibid., p. 17.

59. Ibid., p. 19.

60. Ibid., p. 20.

6. Extra flight pay should be recognized as permanent in time of peace, and a study should be made of the practicability of providing government insurance to flyers. Further, a special aviation medal and ribbon for herosim in war or peace was suggested.

7. Additional training programs and facilities for Air Service reserve officers were recommended.

8. Further study of the feasibility of using enlisted men as pilots was proposed.

9. A five-year procurement and expansion program for the Air Service of the Army was called for. Special congressional appropriations in the next few years for new types of planes were recommended.⁶¹

These nine points were to figure prominently in the passage of the Air Corps Act of 1926, and it quickly becomes apparent that the report of the Morrow Board was a major source of the legislation subsequently to be passed by Congress, after several alternate proposals had gone through the legislative mill and found their final resting place in committee "pigeon holes."

The Morrow Board report contained other detailed recommendations for the Naval Air Service and the aircraft industry. Although the details of naval aviation do not concern the substance of this study, it is interesting to observe that the Morrow Board also found the quality of naval personnel and equipment "at least the equal of any in certain directions undoubtedly superior to that of any other power."⁶² The report noted the existence of a "controversy" regarding the ability of airplanes to sink battleships, but issued no verdict on this fiercely debated issue. Its only conclusion on this matter was that "any present answer must partake more of prophecy than of fact." But

61. Ibid., pp. 19-20.

62. Ibid., p. 23.

the board had to report the existence of "unrest and dissatisfaction among the aviation personnel in the Navy," who felt that "their devotion to aviation had prejudiced their changes for promotion and their opportunity for high command."⁶³ To solve these and other problems, the report called for a number of changes in naval aviation policy, most of which dealt with personnel matters.

As for the aviation industry, the report seemed to be based on assumptions that are themselves significant. For example, there is the basic assumption that because of America's geographical position, the aircraft industry will have a lengthy period in the event of war in which to get into full swing. For, "The size of the air force needed in the event of a great war will always be far beyond anything that is economically feasible to keep up in any country in times of peace."⁶⁴ In time of war the nation must depend in the first months on the permanent aviation industry, and later other civilian production facilities can be gradually brought into an aircraft production program, and by the end of eighteen months the nation's aggregate monthly production would excel that of any other nation, concluded the Morrow Board.

The report observed further that "our geographic situation makes dire urgency of aircraft at the beginning of the war far less important for us than for European countries."⁶⁵ No better illustration of the defensive rather than offensive thinking that pervaded the whole question of national defense policy has been found. Such a way of thinking about national defense underlay most of the policy formulation regarding national defense, not only among civilians, but as was apparent, among the "best minds" of the military leaders.

63. Idem.

64. Ibid., p. 26.

65. Ibid., pp. 27-28. [*Italics mine*].

Because it was apparent to the board that the existence of a strong aviation industry would depend to a great extent upon orders from the military services for its existence, the report recommended a number of policies for governmental adoption. Some of these included:

1. A policy of continuity of orders, to give assurance of a market to the industry at a "standard rate of replacement," using as much as possible machines of stable design.
2. Production orders be given only to companies which maintain design staffs; proprietary rights in design be fully recognized; and governmental competition with civil industry be kept at a minimum.
3. Modification of requirements calling for competitive bidding.
4. Continued governmental research in aeronautical science; and full cooperation of governmental agencies with the aviation industry.⁶⁶

The Morrow Board had, in fact, as Morrow's biographer has suggested the chairman set out to do, rendered its implicit decision that most of Colonel Mitchell's allegations had been grossly exaggerated. The relative quality of the air force of the United States was deemed to be as high as any other nation's, all things being taken into consideration.

The two oceans were still regarded as our greatest bulwarks for defense, and the board's report was influenced greatly by its acceptance of this proposition. No air threat to the United States existed in the foreseeable future. This being so, conditions called for no basic revision of military doctrine or organization.

66. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

On the other hand, the existence was recognized of a large number of relatively minor grievances and defects in policies of organization and personnel in the air services. These grievances, which most military and naval leaders seem to have been convinced were the major causes of much of the "agitation" within and about the air services, were taken care of in great detail by the board's recommendations. The problems of promotion, rank, pay, medals, General Staff representation and other details were resolved in the board's report.

And finally, recognition was given, though not stressed or clearly defined, to the doctrine of an independent mission for an air force, significant enough to call for a change in name from Air Service to Air Corps. Yet no change that can be regarded as radical was suggested. No major dispute with the previous doctrines and policies of the War Department General Staff or the Navy General Board is found in the Morrow Board report. Whatever the wisdom of the report, or whatever its accuracy in retrospect in estimating the national defense needs of the United States, it was clearly a synthesis of the majority views of those appearing before the board who held the most rank, the most power, and who spoke with the most authoritative voices in the military and civilian hierarchy of the War and Navy Departments. The collective voice of the air radicals was loud, and yet it was greatly muffled when crying out in the existing bureaucratic wilderness. The grievances of the air men that were "taken care of" in the Morrow Board's recommendations, if adopted, were however to give them a chance to get their "foot in the door" and in the years to come to have the opportunity of slowly and painfully prying the door further open to their conceptions of military air power.

The hearings and findings of the Morrow Board constitute the first step in the immediate process of policy-making that was to result in the Air Corps Act of 1926. Under the prompting of embarrassing naval disasters and an unprecedented attack upon the administration of military national defense, President Coolidge had taken the initiative in the controversy over military aviation.

As already suggested, the findings of the board were to be generally satisfactory to President Coolidge, while the War and Navy Departments apparently regarded the board's recommendations as an acceptable compromise. Undoubtedly the board had gone further in the attempt to mollify grievances of the air men than the War and Navy Departments leadership would have gone without outside "interference." The retired general and admiral who were members of the board had not been happy with many of the details in the recommendations.⁶⁷ And it is also clear that Howard E. Coffin and Hiram Bingham would have alone, as they had done previously, recommended more basic changes than were called for in the report.

But a partial compromise had been reached by the Morrow Board - a compromise, it is true, which tended to favor the status quo. A few days after the report had been sent to the President, he issued a statement approving it,⁶⁸ with indications that its recommendations would be sent to Congress as part of his annual message.

Hiram Bingham, who with Morrow was most active in handling the board's hearings and report, issued the following statement:

Our conclusions will not please those who think that all is well, nor those who believe that the present organization should continue in its present form. . . . Our conclusions will not please those who go to the other extreme and desire radical changes in the whole scheme of national defense.

67. Interview with Hiram Bingham, April 15, 1953.

68. New York Times (December 5, 1925), p. 1.

Nevertheless I believe that the board is correct in believing that in the present state of the air and science of aviation it is of more importance to discover the best method of achieving an improvement in the air service rather than to attempt to determine the final form, extent and character which will ultimately prove desirable. 69

The chairman, in a letter to Jean Monnet, remarked:

I fear that I am in danger of getting out of the class . . . which tries to get things done for which other people get the credit. In this case I have been somewhat praised and somewhat blamed for what a group of nine men did. 70

Mitchell's Court-Martial

The court-martial trial of Colonel Mitchell had begun on October 28. No attempt will be made here to give a full account of the court-martial proceedings. Mitchell was tried under the 96th Article of War on the basis that his Texas statement had been prejudicial to "good order and military discipline" and which had brought discredit upon the Army.⁷¹

Mitchell, however, had hoped to make his trial a national debate between the air radicals and the conservative General Staff. There are indications that Mitchell suspected the War Department of planning some disciplinary action prior to his Texas statement, in connection with his publication of Winged Defense without first submitting the book for Army approval. When informed that the War

69. New York Times (December 5, 1925), p. 5, from New Haven, Conn.

70. Quoted in Nicholson, op. cit., p. 286. The letter was dated December, 1925.

71. For a photo-copy of the official War Department charges and related papers, see Mitchell Papers. For accounts of Mitchell's trial, see Levine, op. cit., pp. 342-370; Ruth Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 311-338; and U.S. War Department General Court Martial Orders No. 3 (Washington, January 26, 1926).

Department was carefully "reviewing" his book shortly after its publication, Mitchell had remarked: "If the War Department wants to start something, so much the better. Then I can get the case before Congress and the people, and then we will have a chance to remedy the unfortunate condition [of the Air Service]." ⁷² This statement preceded the more inflammatory statement which followed the Shenandoah disaster by only three days. After his Texas statement the New York Times reported, "There appears to be little doubt in Washington among both friends and enemies of Colonel Mitchell that he is endeavoring to force the issue with the War Department in his contention that all . . . aviation should be united in a separate air force." ⁷³

The War Department made clear its unwillingness to allow the trial of Mitchell to develop into a debate over air power; the issue was simply one of military discipline, and the charges against Mitchell were so designed. But Mitchell, assisted by a group of loyal aides and a Congressman from Illinois as chief counsel, did his best to make the court-martial a trial of the larger issues. The proceedings of the court-martial, held in Washington in a small, dingy government building between October 28 and December 17, were public and reported daily in the newspapers. ⁷⁴ No complete stenographic record of the case, which is said to have run 1,400,000 words, is known to be available. ⁷⁵

The following question and answer was prepared as a part of Mitchell's defense in the trial. Although it is not known whether it was actually used in the proceedings, Mitchell's answer reveals his basic reasons for his action.

72. New York Times (September 3, 1925), Associated Press dispatch from San Antonio, Texas, p. 6.

73. Ibid., (September 6, 1925), p. 6.

74. See, for example, New York Times, October - December 1925.

75. See Ruth Mitchell, op. cit., p. 326, who hints that the full record of the trial has been destroyed by the Army.

Q. Why, Colonel Mitchell, did you not use the regular and established channels of communication provided by the War Department for remedying these alleged faults which you thought existed?

A. For the reason that month after month, year after year, I have been doing my utmost, trying to get some results through official channels and my reports and recommendations, the reports and recommendations of other men like me who have been trying to change these conditions have been pigeonholed and disregarded. We have been throttled. We cannot get anywhere. The system is wrong and it is impossible for any individual to make any impression on it. I have tried repeatedly with no result and still lives were lost and treasure being destroyed, and it was increasingly borne upon me that something further must be done, and I decided to tell the truth to the country. Either we tried to tell these things while we yet lived, or die, and let them go on, for we were sure to be killed if we stayed in the service under the conditions. 76

Mitchell's defense was to attempt to prove his charges of incompetence, criminal negligence, and "almost treasonable administration" of the national defense. His friends and supporters, not all of them from the Air Service, came to testify in support of these and other charges. The latter included the contention that all aviation policies were being determined by non-flying officers, that untruthful evidence had been given to Congress by high Army officials, that there had been coercion of junior officers regarding their congressional testimony, and that in general mal-administration was the rule in the War and Navy Departments. In the early stages of these proceedings it may have been difficult for the public to judge whether the War and Navy Departments or Mitchell were on trial. This had been Mitchell's hope, but after much testimony from his supporters, Army and Navy

76. Mitchell Papers, undated. It is not clear whether this statement was prepared for Mitchell by his aides or by him. It is part of a collection of documents indicating very detailed preparation for the trial.

representatives took the stand and by their testimony attempted to offset whatever gains Mitchell seemed to have made. In the closing weeks of the trial, the Morrow Board Report had been released. As noted above, this report had in substance refuted almost all of Mitchell's major charges regarding the condition of the nation's air service, and had concluded that most of Mitchell's organizational proposals were unwise and unwarranted. Only a few days before the court's decision, the Lampert Committee report had also been issued, calling for the establishment of a Department of National Defense. But these and other events during the trial could have only an indirect bearing on the proceedings. Mitchell's conviction on all counts by the Army court was perhaps inevitable, and he was found guilty on December 17. His sentence was a harsh one - suspension from rank, command and duty, with forfeiture of all pay and allowances for a five year period. This sentence was subject to War Department and Presidential review.⁷⁷ Mitchell's resignation from the Army was perhaps as inevitable as the verdict of the court. Mitchell was notified on January 29, 1926 that his resignation, effective February 1, had been accepted by the President.⁷⁸

The hearings and report of the Morrow Board, the trial and conviction of Colonel Mitchell, and the belated report of the Lampert Committee had all contributed to keeping the aviation issue on the front page of the newspapers in the closing months of 1925. Thus Congress, as it convened for its winter session, could not escape from this issue of national defense organization, although military organization would not have ordinarily been a matter of major consideration at that time.

77. New York Times (December 18, 1925), p. 1. It was later modified in regard to pay.

78. War Department, General Orders No. 24, Par. 4 (Washington, January 29, 1926), in Mitchell Papers.

The Lampert Committee Reports

The House's own Select Committee on the air services, as indicated above, issued a report on December 14, 1925 that was, in some respects, contradictory to the Morrow Report which had been released two weeks earlier. For example, the Lampert Committee found that "the Army and Navy have deteriorated in equipment and morale," since the World War.⁷⁹ Further, the House committee had found that the development of aircraft "has introduced an element of mobility in military operations that compels a revision of all military plans of preaircraft days." As for the standing of the United States in "air power" the report found that "the United States is not higher than third and not lower than fifth in the air power of the world."⁸⁰ This committee also reported that the aircraft industry in the United States "has dwindled and is dwindling."⁸¹ In short, the Lampert Committee felt impelled to paint a much darker picture of the condition of American aviation than had the Morrow Board. The findings substantiated directly and implicitly the opinions of the air radicals.

The Lampert Committee concluded its report with twenty-three specific recommendations, many of which paralleled those of the Morrow Board. But the committee did not stop with the suggestion of remedies to clear up what have been called the minor grievances of air men, such as rank, promotion, pay and General Staff representation for the

79. Lampert Committee, Report, p. 4.

80. Ibid., p. 5.

81. Ibid., p. 6.

Air Service. The Lampert Committee had concluded that the establishment of a Department of National Defense, headed by a civilian secretary, who would be charged with the "coordination" of the national defense, was now a necessity. Further, although the report did not specifically require a separation of the Air Service from the Army, it did recommend an all-inclusive budget for the air services of both the Army and Navy.⁸²

Other significant recommendations of the Lampert Committee were:

1. That Congress "determine immediately and settle" by legislation the missions of the Army and Navy.

2. That both the War and Navy Departments should spend at least \$10,000,000 annually for the procurement of new aircraft, to be built by a civilian industry. It was suggested that the government cease competing with the aircraft industry, and there were many points in the recommendations which dealt with the problems of the civilian aircraft industry and commercial aviation.⁸³

3. That a single government agency be charged with the procurement of all aircraft, engines, and equipment.⁸⁴

A concurring report of greater length and detail than the principal report was submitted by Representative Frank Reid, Republican of Illinois, who was serving as civilian counsel to Colonel Mitchell in his court-martial. Reid's report is essentially a documented statement embodying the major planks in the platform of the air radicals and Mitchell, in their campaign for the development of

82. For recommendations, see ibid., pp. 8-9.

83. The committee had initially been created to investigate charges of graft and corruption in government-industry relationships. The report quickly dismissed these charges, stating that there was "no evidence" of graft, corruption or conspiracy.

84. Lampert Committee, Report, pp. 8-9.

American air power.⁸⁵ In this concurring report Reid makes it clear that in a Department of Defense there would be sub-departments of army, navy, and air.

The essence of Reid's concurring report is contained in his assertion, "That an air force, independent of the land and sea power, is the only arm 'which can strike a real blow at each one and all of the links in the chain of the enemy's communications' is, of course, obvious; and from this priority of striking time the air force must be considered as the 'first line of defense.'"⁸⁶

Thus, Congress had received early in the session, from one of its own select legislative committees, the membership in which did not represent the Military or Naval Committees but predominately the patent and inter-state and foreign commerce committees, a report recommending a Department of National Defense and supporting in many respects the views of Colonel Mitchell. This report was the result of the most extensive investigation made by a strictly legislative group on this subject during this period.

Congressional Reaction

Congress had already learned, however, that in broad outline the recommendations of the Morrow Board were to be the administration's aircraft proposals for the first session of the Sixty-ninth Congress. Even so, Coolidge had warned Congress that he did not favor getting into a five-year program that involved large expenditures of money or smacked of a competitive armaments race in military aircraft.

85. See ibid., pp. 24-41.

86. Ibid., p. 29. Reid was quoting Admiral Kerr, from Lampert Committee, Hearings, p. 250.

Coolidge's message to Congress had suggested that the report of the Morrow Board, it will be recalled, "ought to be reassuring to the country, gratifying to the service, and satisfactory to the Congress."

The report may, in fact, have been reassuring to the country, and wide-spread editorial support suggested that some of the vocal elements had been reassured. But its findings were hardly gratifying to the radicals of the Air Service. On the other hand, it is likely that the Army and Navy high command sighed with relief to learn that the board had only compromised mildly with the air radicals. How satisfactory was the report to Congress? This basic question will be considered in some detail in the description of the passage of military air legislation which follows.

The most immediate reaction the new Congress evinced to the events surrounding the air power controversy was related to the conviction and sentencing of Colonel Mitchell. Previously, on the opening day of Congress, two bills had found their way into the legislative hopper, one by Representative John Philip Hill, Republican of Maryland, calling for a Department of Defense,⁸⁷ and another by Representative Charles F. Curry, proposing also a Department of Defense with three under-secretaries for army, navy and air.⁸⁸

The court-martial conviction of Mitchell resulted in a flurry of resolutions, for the most part condemning the Army action taken against Mitchell. One joint resolution was introduced by Thomas S. Blanton, Democrat, of Texas, "To abolish during peace time all court-martial trials . . . to restore to Honorable William Mitchell his proper rank, pay, allowances, and standing . . . to punish those who have conspired to ruin and disgrace him."⁸⁹ Other resolutions

87. H.R. 46, 69th Cong., 1st Sess.

88. H.R. 447, 69th Cong., 1st Sess.

89. H.J. Res. 91, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., December 18, 1925, in Congressional Record, LXVII, 1173.

in a similar vein were introduced in the weeks following Mitchell's conviction, most of them by Democrats. One of these, in a statement on the floor of the House, declared: "You Republicans, bear witness, the Nation and the world holds [sic] you responsible; you have sown of the flesh and you will reap corruption, because truth crushed to earth will rise again."⁹⁰ In the course of these remarks, the speaker included his recommendation for a Department of Air. Congress took these histrionics in its stride and, as the new year began, settled down to the legislative routine.

Meanwhile, one survey of national opinion on the case of Colonel Mitchell was summarized as follows:

While the press as a whole upholds the conviction, if not the sentence, of Colonel Mitchell, the great majority of our newspapers take the view that, despite his technical guilt, he has done the country a service by focusing the attention of Congress and the public on the needs of American aviation. 91

The Literary Digest considered the court-martial as "The case of Colonel Mitchell versus the General Staff and the General Board," and, instead of the case being ended, it seemed "to have only begun." This magazine explained: "But it now moves from the courts to the floor of Congress."⁹²

90. Representative R.A. Green, of Florida, Congressional Record, LXVII (January 7, 1926), 1671.

91. Literary Digest, LXXXVIII (January 2, 1926), p. 6.

92. Idem.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUSE MILITARY COMMITTEE HEARINGS

In the American national legislative process, a bill normally has a long road to travel before reaching the floor of Congress. On the question of military aviation policy, the House, through its Military Affairs Committee, took the initiative in the first session of the Sixty-ninth Congress. The Republicans, as the new session got underway, held sizeable majorities in both the Senate and House. In the Senate there were fifty-six Republicans, thirty-nine Democrats, and one Farmer-Laborite. In the House there were 247 Republicans, 183 Democrats, one independent and two each representing the Farmer-Labor and Socialist Parties.

Major attention will be focused here on the House Military Affairs Committee, for in this group the most significant legislative action occurred. This committee held the most important hearings on military aviation policy in 1926 and it was essentially in this committee that the bill which became law was processed.

The twenty-two-member House Military Committee, including a non-voting delegate from Hawaii, contained many individuals favorable in one degree or another to the expansion of American air power. Committee Chairman John M. Morin, of Pennsylvania, had himself some years earlier sponsored a bill to create a separate Department of Aeronautics.¹ In Morin's frequent absence during this period² the

1. H.R. 11206, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., December 15, 1919.

2. Interview, April 15, 1953, with Fred M. Vinson, Chief Justice of the United States, who was a member of the House Military Committee in 1926.

ranking Republican member, W. Frank James of Michigan, supervised the committee's activities. James was considered a friend of the air radicals. When the committee began hearings on the various aviation bills in January of 1926, two of the bills before the committee, one to carry out the Lassiter Board's recommendations (H.R. 8819, 69th Cong., 1st Sess.) and another to establish a Department of Defense (H.R. 9044, 69th Cong., 1st Sess.), had been introduced by James. Another high ranking Republican committee member, John Philip Hill, was sponsor of H.R. 46, previously mentioned, which also called for a Department of National Defense. J. Mayhew Wainwright, a former Assistant Secretary of War, and a Republican member of the committee, was a supporter of air service expansion too, but took a more moderate view of the means for achieving this than some of the other members. The attitude of these members might be said to have been, in some degree anti-administration on the issue of aviation policy, although cross-pressures were undoubtedly to work on the ranking Republican members at least.

But there was also bi-partisan support for some basic change in national aviation policy. One of Mitchell's most ardent supporters in Congress was a minority member of the committee: John J. McSwain of South Carolina. His barbed questions and cutting wit in the committee hearings were to keep his opponents on the edge of their chairs. Other supporters of increased attention to the development of air power, among the Democratic members, included Hubert F. Fisher of Tennessee, second-ranking minority member, and two of the junior members of the committee, Lister Hill of Alabama and Fred M. Vinson of Kentucky. The ranking minority member, Percy E. Quin of Mississippi, though not a vocal member of the committee was also friendly to the views of the air radicals. All of these men were to play leading roles

in the committee's consideration of aviation policy, and in the handling of the bill later in the legislative procedure. These were the principal actors in the House consideration of aviation measures. It seems likely that with this formidable support for changes in aviation policy, the administration, and particularly the War Department, were aware that the issue had to be met at least with a compromise of their previously well-known position on these matters. It is also clear that a good majority of the House committee members were sympathetic to increased attention to the development of the air service, although less than a majority were willing to support a basic structural revision in the defense establishment. The opinions and actions of other members of the committee is less clear from the public record and other information available.

The House Committee conducted hearings on military aviation proposals for six weeks during January and February. Before the hearings had been concluded, there were eleven bills before the committee, eight of which had been introduced during that session of Congress. The three others, which had been introduced in previous Congresses, were placed among those under consideration. From the bills which had been drafted the following major alternatives were open to the committee:

1. A department of national defense with sub-departments of army, navy, and air.³

2. A department of air on a status with the War and Navy Departments; in one form, a "unified air service."⁴

3. For the various bills to this end, see H.R. 46, in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, pp. 1-3; H.R. 447, ibid., pp. 1329-1347; and H.R. 9044, ibid., pp. 1382-1388.

4. See H.R. 4084, in ibid., pp. 1348-1367. Also reprints of earlier bills, H.R. 11206, 12134, and 13803 (66th Cong.), pp. 1315-1327.

3. An Army Air Corps with a semi-autonomous status, similar to that of the Marine Corps. This was the proposal of General Patrick, Chief of the Air Service, and those who might be considered the air power "gradualists."⁵

4. The "Administration" or War Department bill which, in general, carried out many of the recommendations of the Morrow Board pertaining to the Army Air Service.⁶

There were variations on these general schemes, but these were the major proposals before the House Military Committee, and the hearings of the committee were devoted to obtaining the opinion of the various interested groups on these bills. Similar hearings were held by the House Naval Affairs Committee on the naval aspects of aviation, which had grown out of the findings of the Morrow Board and Lampert Committee for the most part.⁷

Commenting on these matters, the New York Times editorially observed:

Although there have been twenty-five investigations of aviation and the air services, the Military and the Naval Committees of the House propose still other inquiries. Colonel Mitchell will be called. That is to be expected. But what can he say that is new? What fresh light can be thrown on such questions as the comparative importance of the battleship and the airplane and the availability of the great dirigibles for war? 8

The editorial query of the New York Times, "What can he say that is new?" is one which might have been applied to almost any of

5. For the bill embodying General Patrick's proposal, see H.R. 8533 in ibid., pp. 1371-1381.

6. See H.R. 7916, in ibid., pp. 123-125. This bill was later slightly revised and reintroduced as H.R. 9220.

7. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Sundry Legislation Affecting the Naval Establishment, Hearings before Committee on Naval Affairs, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), passim.

8. New York Times (January 16, 1926), p. 14.

the witnesses who appeared before the committee in January and February, 1926. The major differences in the testimony before this committee, and the thousands of pages of fact and opinion that had been accumulated on the subject from the previous years, was that this time it was being presented to a committee which seemed at least determined to take some positive action on military aviation.

Witnesses from the War Department, the Navy Department, and the Air Service were again paraded before the committee to offer what was for the most part well-rehearsed and familiar testimony. The War and Navy Departments were again in alliance in rejecting unequivocally the proposals for a Department of Defense, a Department of Air, or General Patrick's theory of "gradualism" which called for the immediate creation of a semi-autonomous Air Corps with a Department of Defense to follow at some later date.

Most General Staff officers testified before the committee in words which sounded like the re-playing of an old phonograph record, distinctly reminiscent of testimony which had been spoken again and again as the issue was reviewed in the post-war years by congressional committees, boards and other investigating groups. "There is no more necessity for an air force independent of the Army commander than there is for a large force of Cavalry independent of it," stated Brigadier General Harry A. Smith, head of the War Plans Division of the General Staff.⁹ Smith asserted:

There is nothing more mysterious in a bomb dropping from an airplane than there is in a 16-inch shell fired from a high-powered gun. The whole art of war is 99 per cent plain common sense, and in time of peace some of the services make the whole art of war 99 per cent bunk. 10

9. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 588.

10. Ibid., p. 589.

It was quite apparent that a sizeable portion of the General Staff officers considered many of the theories of the air radicals as "99 per cent bunk."

Speaking in specific opposition to the proposal to create a separate Air Corps, independent of the Army, Brigadier General Campbell King, Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel, reasserted the Army's standard argument that such an organization "violates one of the fundamental principles in war, unity of command." But this argument was not carried to what some persons thought was its ultimate conclusion, that is, a Department of Defense to insure full "unity of command." General King explained it in this way:

The Army and Navy operate in different theaters, the one on land, the other on sea. The application of the principle of unity of command is not so immediate and imperative as in the case of operations over the same theater. Such coordination as is necessary . . . we now have in the Joint Army and Navy Board. 11

This was to be the standard argument of the War and Navy Departments' officials when pressed on the seeming inconsistency of their stand favoring the principle of "unity of command" yet opposed to the fulfillment of this principle in a "unified" Department of Defense.

War Department representatives, when given the opportunity, usually endorsed with high praise the Morrow Board and its findings. Most of them seemed to feel that the Morrow Board had set the record right in regard to military aviation. In the words of Assistant Chief of Staff Hugh A. Drum:

I do not know what prompted the bringing of the Morrow Board into being. I personally feel it was a very fine thing, because I think the public as a whole had a very erroneous impression as to the state of affairs in the

11. Ibid., p. 500.

Army and Navy Services, and one of the best ways to get before the public the true state of affairs was to have such hearings as they had. 12

Secretary of War Dwight Davis came before the committee in full support of his General Staff and the Morrow Board report. Indicating that basic War Department doctrines of war and organization had not changed, Davis declared, "I believe that the general principles set forth by General Pershing, ex-Secretary of War Baker, ex-Secretary of War Weeks, the various military boards, and recently by the President's aircraft board, are sound."¹³ Asked about the War Department's reaction to the report of the Lampert Committee which, it will be recalled, had recommended a Department of Defense, Davis replied that the committee's recommendations "are being studied in the War Department."¹⁴ Davis went on to make it perfectly clear that the War Department was willing to go absolutely no further in any reorganization scheme than the appointment of an Assistant Secretary of War for Air.¹⁵ In general, the War Department General Staff, from the testimony of its representatives, did not seem to have departed from the spirit behind the statement of the Chief of Staff a few months previously, that "In my opinion the airplane is never going to take the place of the cavalry."¹⁶

In his testimony before the committee, the Secretary of the Navy was surprisingly frank about the sources of his opinions on the issues under consideration. He said, "You quite realize the Secretary of the Navy is a civilian occupying a place at the head of the Navy Department for a comparatively short time and that the opinions of the individuals who happen to be Secretary of the Navy are perhaps no better and perhaps not as good as those of the members of

12. Ibid., p. 741.

13. Ibid., p. 129.

14. Ibid., p. 135.

15. Ibid., p. 173.

16. Morrow Board, Hearings, p. 96.

this committee, some of whom have been students of the problem for years." Secretary Wilbur went on to explain his assumption that the committee was seeking not so much his personal opinion as "what the department itself, speaking through the Secretary of the Navy, may believe to be for the best interests of the country, and what the department may recommend to you as members of this committee."¹⁷ Wilbur then proceeded to give the collective Navy Department opinion that the wisest policy to be followed would be to "go forward under our present system of organization, with such changes as may be made from time to time, including those suggested by the Morrow Board, and that the economies to be effected by better coordination of the Army and Navy may be worked out in detail as the questions arise."¹⁸ Wilbur declared, "We are planning to stand by the Morrow Board." When asked by a member of the committee whether President Coolidge had conferred with him about the selection of members of the Morrow Board, Wilbur replied, "I do not think that is a question I should answer."¹⁹

Admiral Moffett, Chief of the Naval Bureau of Aeronautics, echoed the sentiment of the Secretary of the Navy and most other representatives when he also declared, "I am fully out for the Morrow Board . . . I am in favor of the Morrow Board."²⁰ General Patrick's bill for an independent air service (H.R. 8533) was condemned by Admiral Moffett as being "at variance with the recommendations of the War Department, the Navy Department, the President's Aircraft Board, and of the great majority of experienced officers of the Army and Navy."²¹

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17. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 189.
 18. Ibid., p. 189.
 19. Ibid., p. 203.
 20. Ibid., p. 709.
 21. Ibid., p. 687.

A Republican member of the House Appropriations Committee, Burton L. French, of Idaho, appeared before the committee to state a point of view which had often been presented by the Navy. This was the belief that the United States should not develop an aviation policy that had in mind the bombing of non-military targets as part of war strategy. Believing that such a mode of warfare was out of harmony with international law, French said, "I dismiss that use of the airplane, granting that it would be possible, from consideration."²² Even if the theory of strategic bombing were valid, French testified, he was opposed to allowing the incorporation of such a policy into American military doctrine, even as a potential retaliatory weapon.

If the Army and Navy views presented before the committee sounded like the re-playing of an old phonograph record, the testimony of the air radicals was certainly no less repetitious. The chief witnesses for the Air Service point of view were Mitchell and the Chief of the Air Service, Major-General Mason M. Patrick. Patrick was perhaps the most important committee witness, for his theory of air power "gradualism" seemed to be the most likely to succeed with a committee which contained a number of air enthusiasts but also a group willing, apparently, to follow the administration's line that the Morrow Board's recommendations were the only acceptable ones. Of all the proposals calling for fundamental changes in the nation's military organization, General Patrick's "Air Corps" plans seemed to have the best chance of being adopted as a compromise by a committee split several ways on the issue.

22. Ibid., p. 796.

The most colorful witness before the committee was neither Mitchell nor Patrick at this time, but a World War Air Service pilot, and Representative from New York City, Fiorello H. LaGuardia. LaGuardia had long been an advocate of air power expansion and a harsh critic of the General Staff. In his testimony before this committee, he dug down deep for new phrases with which to condemn the War Department.

There is one obstacle in the way of new legislation, Mr. Chairman. That is the General Staff. If this committee does not lock the doors to the General Staff, you will not get a bill through. . . . The General Staff are [sic] either hopelessly stupid or unpardonably guilty in refusing to recognize the necessity of making a change in aviation. . . . The general Staff officers do not like aviation. Some of them won't get into a plane; they refuse to fly. Any military man who refuses to fly is just plain, ordinary, everyday yellow, and has no business in the Army. 23

As for his specific advice on the legislation before the committee, LaGuardia declared:

I would like to see this committee courageously report out the Hill Bill. [H.R. 46 establishing a Department of Defense.] If the time is not ripe for that - I do not see why it is not; we have to start somewhere - give us the Curry Bill [H.R. 4084, establishing a Department of Air]. . . . The country is back of it; the country wants a separate Air Service. There is no doubt about it. 24

LaGuardia's extravagant remarks apparently prompted Representative James, the ranking member and often acting chairman of the committee, to join in criticism of the War and Navy Departments and to remark: "Sometimes I think in the War Department and the Navy Department the words 'cooperation and coordination' are synonymous of apple sauce,"²⁵

23. Ibid., pp. 383-384.

24. Ibid., p. 388.

25. Ibid., p. 390.

Mitchell, newly a civilian and unbridled by War Department or Air Service policy, in his testimony stated his theories and doctrines of warfare to the committee with even less restraint than previously.²⁶ Mitchell stated his theory of strategic bombing bluntly to the committee. ". . . in the future," he said, "we will strive . . . to go straight to the vital centers, the industrial centers, through the use of an air force and hit them. That is the modern theory of making war."²⁷ Mitchell, who in previous years had favored a separate air service, now without qualification favored a Department of Defense and the assignment of "specific missions to air power," to "sea power," and to "land power." The specific mission of air power would be to defend "all the air areas of the country." He said there was no longer a question of coast defense, but rather a question of "air defense." He would assign to the Navy the specific mission of protecting the sea lanes of communication by water, and to the Army the protection of all land areas.²⁸

Mitchell's testimony was, in great part, a rephrasing of parts of his book, Winged Defense. As for the then current state of the air service, Mitchell told the committee, "the thing is in a terrible mess - just a waste of money, practically, to put a dollar into it."²⁹

Mitchell hinted that the steel industry, which supplied battleship armor, may have been preventing the development of aircraft.³⁰ He also accused the Army and Navy, upon seeing their systems "crumbling" with the advent of air power, of sending forth

26. Mitchell, preparing to set out on a nation-wide lecture tour, was apparently enjoying his newly-won freedom. A few months later he wrote to his successor, Brig. Gen. James H. Fechet, "It certainly is fine to be out of the service." Mitchell to Fechet, May 8, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers.

27. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 397.

28. Ibid., pp. 397-398.

29. Ibid., p. 399.

30. Ibid., p. 422.

anti-air "propaganda . . . the bureaucrats are up here lobbying all the time." The trouble with the Army officials, whom Mitchell enjoyed called "brass heads" instead of the usual term "brass hats," was that they had been brought up in a system which "worships Infantry and nothing else." On the other hand, "The Navy was brought up in the battleship and it worships it like the Buddhist does up in his room the Buddha."³¹

General Patrick appeared before the committee in support of his bill to establish a semi-independent Air Corps. But he made clear his conception of a proper national defense organization in these words: "I think the ultimate distance you must travel will carry you to a department of national defense."³² Patrick was entirely willing, however, to settle for something less at that time. He believed that one of the most pressing needs of military aviation was a statutory definition of the missions of the various services. Referring to the long-standing dispute between the Army and Navy over the defense of the coast, Patrick advised: "I propose that Congress should settle it once for all and avoid that sort of contention which is now in existence; in other words a legislative definition of this mission will clear up the entire point."³³ Patrick desired that the Air Service alone be assigned the mission of air defense of the coast, although he was aware of Navy opposition to this.

Patrick assured the committee that at no time while he had been Air Service chief had he had a sufficient number of planes. For the most part, this had been "merely a matter of dollars and cents."³⁴ But he did not openly criticize the War Department of this condition, stating that it had been as generous as possible with the money

31. Ibid., p. 429.

32. Ibid., p. 292.

33. Ibid., p. 271.

34. Ibid., p. 279.

Congress had supplied, "without neglecting its other components."³⁵ In answer to a question from Representative James, Patrick indicated that he was willing to compromise on over-all aviation policy if the alternative was no legislation at all.³⁶ This reply by Patrick was perhaps one of the most significant he made at the hearing.

Another witness who can be placed in the "friends of the Air Service" camp was Representative Randolph Perkins, Republican of New Jersey. Perkins had been one of the most active members of the Lampert Committee; in fact, that committee was referred to by some, informally, as the "Perkins Committee." He had also sat in on the hearings of the Morrow Board. As he made these studies he held a keen ear to the question of the value of the information obtained by Congress from individual officers. He told the House Committee at this time that he had found "great hesitation on the part of numerous witnesses to tell what they individually thought." For the most part, he said, this had not been the result of overt intimidation, but of a natural desire for self-preservation, promotion, and recognition within the system. There was a feeling among some that "It is a long distance from here to Guam," Perkins reported.

Perkins further observed, perhaps not very much to the surprise of most committee members, that most of the "evidence" submitted by representatives from the War and Navy Departments was "what you might call collective evidence, not their own individual opinions and beliefs, not based on any scientific knowledge of their own, but rather evidence tending to establish the doctrine of the Army or Navy."³⁷ He agreed that Representative Speaks's definition

35. Ibid., p. 269.

36. Ibid., pp. 300-301.

37. Ibid., p. 329.

of this as "canned" evidence was a good one. "These great departments of defense of our country are naturally long established and, I might say, almost as well established as the church, and they have doctrines of their own. Their doctrine is orthodoxy."³⁸

Perkins supported the idea of a Department of Defense, and was particularly concerned with the building up and maintenance of a civilian aircraft industry as the backlog of national air defense.

Reed Landis, a major in the Air Service Reserve and Secretary of the American Legion's Aeronautics Committee, also brought powerful support to the proposal being advocated by the air radicals. He presented to the House Committee a resolution, adopted at the 1925 national convention at Omaha, stating that the Legion was "impressed with the proposal to reorganize our national defense under one cabinet officer with subdivisions of equal importance for the land, sea, and air forces, because of the promised centralized control, enhanced efficiency, and economy in operation."³⁹ Upon questioning Landis made it clear that the Legion had been "favorably impressed" with the idea, although the wording of the resolution betrayed the fact that there had been considerable controversy at the national convention regarding this resolution, and that only in this form had it been approved.⁴⁰ Landis was warned by Representative McSwain that the American Legion, having taken this position, had better be on the lookout, "because the Army and Navy are not only great agencies for fighting but they are great agencies for propaganda and they will put their propaganda machinery to work to seek to have the American Legion reverse its position." He added, "I look for the enginers of propaganda to be active and you had better be on guard."⁴¹

38. Ibid., p. 330.

39. Ibid., p. 775.

40. See New York Times (October 6, 1925), p. 6.

41. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 783.

Another civilian, John K. Montgomery, speaking as an Air Service reserve officer, told the committee that:

We think, as civilians, not as representing the War Department, the Morrow Report was just . . . a palliative . . . a headache pill when the thing you need is something to clean the bowels. . . . It is like putting salve on a boil instead of cleaning the system out. 42

Specifically, Montgomery urged the committee to hasten to enact the Air Corps bill suggested by General Patrick, saying "if you start talking on this thing, you will have hearings from now until July, we are afraid, and we won't get anything."⁴³ He favored a Department of Defense eventually, but implied the necessity for a compromise at that time.

Representative Charles F. Curry, who had many times since 1919 introduced bills to create a separate air department, testified that

Our national defense system is antiquated, archaic, and crumbling. It is our most urgent duty to consider the whole question of national defense and to provide the most effective, efficient, and economical defense the art of war can devise. 44

Further, in recounting his repeated efforts to change the defense organization to allow for the new medium of warfare, Curry declared:

I introduced in 1919 a bill providing for a department of aeronautics in the Government and I introduced a similar bill in each succeeding Congress. It has been a long drawn-out and sometimes wearisome fight, but I have been encouraged by the fact that each year has brought fresh support until to-day I am convinced that the vast majority of the thinking people of the country demand a complete overhauling of our defense system and a thorough building-up program. 45

42. Ibid., p. 380.

43. Ibid., p. 379.

44. Ibid., p. 233.

45. Ibid., pp. 233-234.

If Mitchell's earlier contention that "Changes in military systems come about only through disaster in war or the pressure of public opinion" had been valid, then Curry's statement should have been encouraging to the air radicals. But it is apparent that Curry had greatly over-estimated the public interest in this issue at the time. There were other pressures operating on the policy-makers and on "public opinion" which very likely overshadowed whatever concern may have been had for the organization for national defense. These included the pressures of pacifism, anti-foreignism, and economy in government.

CHAPTER XVII

THE AIR RADICALS MOVE TO WIN SUPPORT

As the House committee was deliberating on the conflicting opinions it was receiving from these various sources, the air radicals were busily attempting to drum up support from the outside which they hoped would have a forceful effect on the decision-makers in Congress. Mitchell had many times expressed his belief that the strongest pressure for forcing changes in the defense establishment would have to come through an aroused public opinion. He had spent a good deal of his post-war career trying to arouse, in many ways, and sustain popular support for air power expansion. Most of his major moves obviously were calculated to foster popular support for his ideas. He had expressed, in his testimony before the House committee, his belief in a great upsurge of public support for air power. This support, he told the committee, "is not going to stop; this thing will be ten times as strong next fall as it is now. There is no stopping it now the steam roller is under way."¹

Because of efforts to keep such a "steam roller" under way, considerable excitement had been aroused during the course of the House committee hearings over the "irregular" activities of certain officers within the office of the Chief of Air Service. These activities were designed to influence congressional legislation affecting the air service. Newspapers revealed on February 9 that Secretary of War Davis had ordered the Army's Inspector General to make an investigation of evidence that the Air Service officers were,

1. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 418.

in violation of War Department General Orders, attempting to influence legislation by the distribution of circulars.² Apparently, Air Service officers had been sent such circulars, allegedly mimeographed in the Washington Air Service headquarters, urging them to attempt to influence members of Congress into favoring reorganization of the national defense establishment. The circulars read, in part, as follows:

We have tried to put across the idea of reorganization in which the Air Service can be developed and operated so that it will be able to give its maximum of efficiency and effectiveness.

There are two Senators from your state and a Representative from your district. Also you must know people of prominence in your state who can communicate . . . people whose communication will be given more than casual consideration. It is to your interest to get in touch with those people, as your future in the service will depend largely upon legislation in this session of Congress. Get them to back the reorganization of the Air Service along the lines as outlined herewith, so that their Senators and Representatives in Washington will know what the folks back home want.

This is your party as much as ours. We all must get busy and do it now. Next month will be too late. We are relying on you to do your share of this work. Do not throw us down. 3

The Secretary of War's announced intention to investigate the distribution of the circulars brought an immediate attack upon himself by the air radicals and members of the House committee who were favorable to a more drastic reorganization of the Air Service than the Morrow Board or the subsequent War Department bill (H.R. 7916) had recommended. Speaking of the announced investigation of Air Service propaganda activities, Mitchell remarked that the action was further

2. New York Times (February 9, 1926), p. 27.

3. Reprinted in idem.

evidence of the War Department's desire to "intimidate officers who are honest and wish to do what they can to improve the service."⁴

He asserted the action was in fact directed against General Patrick, whose plan, incorporated in what was called the Wainwright Bill (H.R. 8533) went beyond the recommendations of Congress by the War Department. ". . . the War Department wants to bludgeon General Patrick into silence," Mitchell charged. "He has taken my place and now they are going after him." And Mitchell elaborated on this:

All our people - those in the flying service who know what Congress wants to know - are going to be bulldozed by this bureaucracy. The Navy is starting the same thing and in a day or two the country will see the hands of the navy trying to force the wise officers to silence. 5

Commenting the next day on this situation, caused by the intense feeling on the subject, and aided by the fact that General Patrick had presumably felt that he had enough support within the House committee to make recommendations that were contrary to well-known War Department policy on aviation, the New York Times observed editorially: "The point does not have to be labored that propaganda by officers of the Army Air Service to bring about legislation that they want and that the President as Commander-in-Chief regards as unwise must be subversive of discipline."⁶

But members of the House committee who were friendly to the Air Service had soon decided, in executive session, that there ought to be an "investigation of the Army's investigation." There was concern among some members of the committee that the War Department may have been trying to "gag" General Patrick and other officers whose views were contrary to those of the high command. Newspaper

4. Idem.

5. Idem.

6. New York Times (February 10, 1926), p. 22.

reports suggested that Secretary Davis had made personal calls on members of the committee to assure them that General Patrick was not being intimidated for his views, but that the issuance of circulars in an attempt to influence legislation was a violation of Army orders, and this was the sole cause of the official Army investigation.⁷ General Patrick's own investigation of "informational" activities originating within his department soon indicated that "irregular" activities had been carried on, specifically in connection with the distribution of the circulars described above. The matter was cleared up by the announcement from the Air Service that two of its majors had been singled out for disciplining for their complicity in this matter. One of these majors was merely reprimanded, but the other was "exiled" to a Kansas Cavalry post. General Patrick's statement on the matter read as follows:

The investigation disclosed the fact that only two officers in this office were concerned in an attempt to influence legislation in what I regard as an objectionable manner. Both of them were reprimanded, and one of them, no longer wanted in my office, will be sent to another station. 8

The officer "no longer wanted" was Major H.H. Arnold, later to become commanding general of the Army Air Forces. Arnold had been information officer under General Patrick until it was discovered that he was, in his enthusiasm for promoting certain legislation, giving out the "wrong" information. He was reassigned as commanding officer of an observation squadron at Fort Riley, Kansas.⁹

Another attempt to stir up popular interest, enthusiasm, and support for the expansion of American air power got under way as Mitchell began his nation-wide lecture tour in Carnegie Hall, New

7. New York Times (February 11, 1926), p. 6.

8. Quoted in New York Times (February 18, 1926), p. 25.

9. For Arnold's version of this, see his Global Mission, pp. 121-122.

York City, on February 10. Although Mitchell received during and following his court-martial scores of requests to speak at meetings of civic and business clubs and particularly veterans' organizations, his lecture tour was strictly under the management of a professional lecture bureau, to which all personal appearance requests were forwarded.¹⁰ Mitchell's first appearance in his lecture tour did not command a large audience, which one newspaper attributed to bad weather.¹¹ But even without the excuse of bad weather, there is evidence in Mitchell's correspondence that his lecture audiences, with some exceptions, were disappointing. Mitchell's wife wrote to her father on February 21, "Billy hasn't had people in most of the cities, but he has in some."¹² She reported that Mitchell "just telephones [sic] from Altoona that he had had a most thrilling reception there, with the whole town turned out to receive him, lining the streets, and waving flags, etc." But the impression left was that the audiences had been smaller than anticipated, at least during the first ten days. Mitchell's wife requested that her father, a prominent Detroit resident, attempt to get Edsel Ford to introduce Mitchell in his forthcoming Detroit lecture. "I thought it might be a drawing card, and also a sort of patriotic step for Edsell [sic] if he did it."¹³

Mitchell's audiences continued to be small in spite of the assistance he had in several areas, particularly from friendly newspapers and Air Service reserve or other veterans' groups. In at least one city his appearance on the lecture platform was heralded in advance by notices dropped from airplanes. These multicolored paper leaflets, cut in the shape of a "bomb," carried the inscription:

10. See Mitchell Papers, circa 1926.

11. New York Times (February 11, 1926), p. 6.

12. Mrs. Mitchell to Sidney T. Miller, February 21, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers.

13. Idem.

"This is not a real BOMB. It is only a friendly aerial message dropped by World War fliers seriously interested in having the United States assume a lead in Air Activities. LET GENERAL MITCHELL TELL YOU ABOUT IT."¹⁴ The leaflets also carried a be-medalled photograph of Mitchell, captioned "World's Greatest Airman."

Mitchell's largest audiences were in towns where his lecture had been "free lectures, bought up by the newspapers."¹⁵ Under these circumstances Mitchell could write of "wonderful audiences - for instance, we had about 12,000 seated in the great auditorium in Cleveland, and three or four thousand more outside listening to the loudspeakers. I think in Ohio, in four lectures, that I talked to over 25,000 people." But in most other places, "where some little professional sponsored the affair, there have been only three or four hundred." Mitchell further reported that "People seem to be intensely interested in the subject but consider it largely from a political standpoint, and are not willing to pay very much for it, principally because they don't know the character of the lecture being given." Mitchell, with no more modesty than usual, observed in this letter to his publisher, "I have worked up the lecture to the point where I think it is very good - so do those who hear it."¹⁶

About three weeks later Mitchell commented again on his lecture tour, which, he reported in a letter to his wife's father, "has brought in some return - not a very large one but still more than most lecturers get." He added, "One reason for the small returns has been that the lecture bureau overshot the mark and expected larger audiences than were forthcoming."¹⁷

14. Copies of these "bomb" leaflets prompting Mitchell's appearance in Minneapolis, Minnesota on March 9, 1926, are found in Mitchell Papers.

15. Mitchell to George P. Putnam, March 22, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers.

16. Ibid.

17. Mitchell to Sidney T. Miller, April 15, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers.

Mitchell noted, however, in several of his letters, that the lecture tour should "bear fruit" in the future. To one correspondent he wrote:

The people really know very little about aeronautics, as a general rule. When they find out what it really is, they are very much for it. I am sure that this tour I am making will be well repaid in the future. 18

Mitchell's lectures were generally an exposition of his theories of air power set forth in popular form. Part of the lecture time was usually taken up by the exhibition of movies of the sinking by aircraft bombardment of the battleship Ostfriesland. Mitchell would then explain "Why I took the course I did," and conclude with the exhortation that the "people must demand that present conditions be remedied."¹⁹

But, as one of Mitchell's biographers has written, "Mitchell pounded his vision of air power into his audiences, who would come to see him rather than to heed him."²⁰ It is not unlikely that a sizeable part of many of the thousands who did turn out to hear Mitchell, especially at the "free lectures" sponsored by local newspapers, had come out, before the days of widespread attention to movies, radio, or television, to spend an evening "seeing" and perhaps listening to a colorful and controversial hero or villain. Congressmen directly concerned with the aviation issue recall no noticeable volume of mail in support of Mitchell's ideas.²¹

18. Mitchell to Col. J.G. Vincent, April 5, 1926, in Mitchell Papers.

19. These topical headings are from battered copies of speech outlines, apparently used on his lecture tour and indicating the nature of his lectures, in Mitchell Papers.

20. Levine, op. cit., p. 375.

21. Interviews with Representatives B. Carroll Reece and Carl Vinson, and Chief Justice and former Representative Fred M. Vinson, April, 1953.

Yet Mitchell had obviously done much to popularize the issue of the effect of military aircraft on the national defense establishment of the United States. Mitchell's correspondence of late 1925 and 1926 reveals a large volume of mail from students who were faced with the task of preparing for high school debates on the subject: "Resolved: The United States Should Have A Separate Air Service (or Department of Defense)." One of the debates included in the University Debater's Annual for 1925-26 was a debate: "Resolved: That the Air Service of the United States should be a Separate Department of Our National Defense."²² Mitchell's correspondence secretary, often his wife, would send along material, and usually correspondents were referred for additional information to the United States Air Force Association, Publicity and Information Bureau, located in Washington, D.C.²³

Mitchell's intentions at this time were stated bluntly in a letter to a person who had done much to influence his thinking about air power, British Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard. To Trenchard he wrote: "I became so fed up with the way things were being conducted, I thought I could do more outside the service than in it, so I am making a lecture tour of the country and shall keep up the fight for a United Air Service until we get it."²⁴

In addition to the lecture tour, there was another important effort being made in Washington to influence public thinking about air power. This was the work of the United States Air Force Association, whose national chairman was Captain "Eddie" Rickenbacker, World War

22. University Debater's Annual, 1925-1926, ed. by Edith M. Phelps (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1926), pp. 284-312.

23. See Mitchell Papers, circa 1925-1926.

24. Mitchell to Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard, March 12, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers.

aviation hero, and whose "Director-General" was Colonel J. Edward Cassidy. Cassidy actively managed the association's Bureau of Publicity and Information which did not exist solely for the dissemination of information to high school debating societies. During the period of early 1926 especially, when Congress was seriously considering aviation legislation, Cassidy was busily issuing press releases. These releases were obviously designed to play upon the conflicts over the aviation issue between the House Committee on Military Affairs, on the one hand, and the Secretary of War and his General Staff on the other. One such release, issued at the time of the War Department investigation of attempts to influence legislation by Air Service officers, stated; "This investigation is a direct challenge to Congress as to the rights of that body to secure information relative to the National Defense from officers who are in a position to know what they are talking about."²⁵ Further, the press release declared that the Morrow Board was simply "an official body which has no legal standing and should not receive any serious consideration, as regularly authorized committees of Congress have made thorough investigations in accordance with the law." According to the release, "The question before the public is whether or not Congress is willing to unconditionally surrender to the War Department Bureaucracy its rights and its duties to the public."²⁶ Such releases, signed by Colonel J. Edward Cassidy, were numerous during this period²⁷ and they carried in general the Mitchell "line" regarding the development of air power and the alternatives before Congress. Attempts were made to capitalize on the War Department-House Military

25. U.S. Air Force Association, Bureau of Publicity and Information, Press Release, February 15, 1926, mimeographed copy in Mitchell Papers.

26. Idem.

27. See Mitchell Papers.

Committee differences, particularly emphasizing the differences between the findings of the Morrow Board and the Lampert Committee on the Department of Defense issue.

Part of the financial support for these enterprises of the Air Force Association came from friends and supporters of Mitchell. In a letter from Mitchell's wife to Joseph E. Davies, later United States Ambassador to Russia and at that time a prominent Washington attorney who had played a controversial role in the Naval Court of Inquiry on the Shenandoah disaster,²⁸ Mrs. Mitchell thanked Davies for the "receipt of the enormous sum." She continued:

I can't ever tell you how wonderful I think you are, to have gotten all that money for Billy's air fight. . . . I only wish those kindly men who helped you would let their names be known. . . . I gave one [of the checks] to Cassidy. . . . I am awaiting developments and seeing how he spends what he has, and what comes of it. 29

But aid to the Air Force Association's activities at this time seems to have been largely limited to contributions from Mitchell's friends. Apparently a large part of the aircraft industry did not support fully Mitchell's ideas.

A plan to elect Mitchell president of the National Aeronautic Association at its annual convention in September, upon the sponsorship of Rickenbacker, Cassidy and Frank Tichenor, editor of the popular aviation magazine Aero Digest, collapsed in the face of opposition from the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, according to Mitchell's biographer.³⁰ The aircraft industry was unwilling to support the radical views of Mitchell at this time. Mitchell then turned to the idea of building up the Air Force Association into a larger national

28. See Levine, op. cit., pp. 357-358.

29. Mrs. Mitchell to Joseph E. Davies, February 21, 1926, copy in Mitchell Papers..

30. Levine, op. cit., p. 377.

organization with the purpose of getting "the facts before the people and to fight this bureaucracy in Washington."³¹

During the same period, Mitchell was to write of the "Army and Navy lobbies" and their "propaganda agencies" which were actively working to thwart the will of Congress and the people on the development of aviation,³² but no tangible proof of their existence was offered in evidence. It is apparent that if such "lobbies" existed they were more subtle in their operations and activities than some of those at work to support Mitchell's theories.

31. Idem.

32. Typed manuscript, ca. March 1926, in Mitchell Papers.



A PUZZLING GUIDE-POST

—Pease in the Newark News.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONGRESS MAKES A DECISION

"How in the world are we to know what to do . . ." exclaimed a House Military Committee member in 1926.¹ He was harassed and perplexed by the donflicting information on the aviation issue which was being given by various groups to the committee in its hearings.

The House Military Affairs Committee, divided in its opinion on the alternatives at issue, neared the completion in February of its public hearings which had, as usual, produced for committee consideration a myriad of conflicting testimony from the Air Service, the War Department, and the Navy. It is likely that a sincere feeling of confusion descended upon a number of committee members as they approached a decision on the issues before them. One such member, in the course of the hearings explained his dilemma in this fashion:

Of course, even the members of this committee are oftentimes in a quandry because one high ranking officer comes before us from the War Department and testifies that we should have a separate Air Corps and that we should unify the Air Service under that corps, and that by doing that duplication will be avoided, and that irregularities will disappear and animosities will all disappear.

Then another officer of equally high rank and importance comes before us and tells us that if we do create a separate air corps we will have all manner of duplication and confusion. . . . how are we going to be able to decide which is the best thing to do? 2

1. Representative Daniel E. Garrett, in House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 518.

2. Ibid., pp. 517-518. [Italics mine].

Early in the hearings, another member had expressed the impatience felt by at least several other members of the committee when he said:

There is necessity for some new legislation relating to the national defense. I have been on this committee several years and the question has been up constantly during the entire period. The Lampert Committee consumed months, the Morrow Committee another period of time. Now, do you not feel that since every man in the United States or a representative of every group qualified to give advice or throw light on this important subject has already presented his views, and the record is available, and, since it is the duty of Congress to provide the system, that we ought to act without further hearings? 3

This inquiry was directed to the Secretary of War, who answered, amidst laughter, "I will assure you you can not get up an argument with me on that subject." Yet the hearings went on for several weeks, and in all almost a thousand printed pages of testimony were taken.

Representative W. Frank James, ranking member of the committee and in charge of its activities during much of this period, also made significant observations in this regard at an early stage in the hearings. He stated to the Secretary of War:

I think every member of the committee would like to see something done in this session. Some of us have been on aviation hearings since 1919. I do not suppose, probably on account of the red tape down in the War Department, you can do what I suggest. I think, however, if you are going to have any legislation at this session, if you, who are a very busy man, could come up and sit with us in executive session, for six or seven days, and have General Patrick with you, and have nobody around except you and the members of this committee, there is no doubt in my mind that we would work out something on this bill. As one member of this committee, I would not dare to vote

3. Ibid., p. 150. Representative John C. Speaks, Republican of Ohio.

on this bill and to report it out and tell the House and the country that since 1919 the only solution we have is a bill to provide for two brigadier generals and a few other things of that kind. . . . my impression is we are not going to get anywhere if you have to submit General Patrick's proposed bill to the General Staff and take two or three years to have it come back to you. 4

Further impatience was expressed by Representative Speaks, who exclaimed to the Secretary of War, "Something is wrong evidently. We are spending days, weeks, months, in considering troubles in the service largely executive and administrative in character. I am trying to place the responsibility [for inefficiency in the Air Service]." ⁵ The committee was in fact faced with a number of issues that were "largely executive and administrative" in character, but the major issue before them was the choice of an alternative for the basic organization of military air power. As suggested earlier, the three major proposals before the committee called for a Department of Defense, a Department of Air, or General Patrick's semi-independent Air Corps proposal. Most of the hearings had in fact been taken up with questions on the details of some of the administrative problems in the Air Service. Questions and discussion in the public hearings on the broader issues of national security and United States foreign policy were negligible. Most of the pages of the printed hearings are concerned with discussion of rank, pay, promotion, and quality of the aircraft machinery and similar questions. But on the basis of this mass of details, the committee had to decide upon one of the major alternatives previously listed, or upon the other powerfully supported choice of accepting the War Department's proposal, growing out of the Morrow Board recommendation, to make no

4. Ibid., p. 172.

5. Ibid., p. 176.

basic change in the national defense establishment, but simply to make a number of relatively minor alterations within the overall existing structure of the War Department. The House bill that would follow the War Department's wishes was known as the "Morin Bill," bearing the name of the chairman of the committee. But Chairman Morin later told the committee, when Mitchell was testifying, ". . . I do not claim it as mine. . . . It was left on the doorstep."

To this remark, Representative James added:

That is not a legitimate child of the chairman. If you will read the hearings and his real views, you will find the chairman goes nearly as far as the rest of us on a unified air service. It was just forced upon him. 6

James had referred to proposed air legislation before past committees, when the question had come up of whether those members of the committee favoring basic changes in military organization should press for these changes immediately or accept compromise. "We were not able to compromise . . . and nothing was done," James reported. James indicated that he had previously inclined to a "unified air service," and more recently he stated: "The more I study the Hill bill and the Curry bill, the more I am convinced we should go that far."⁷ But he added, "I do not believe, however, even if the Hill bill or the Curry bill was reported out by the Military Affairs Committee at this session of Congress, it could pass the House."⁸ The Republican leadership of the House in this period is said to have been tightly organized. According to a well-informed observer writing of the situation under Republican leadership a few years earlier,

6. Ibid., p. 417. The "Morin Bill," H.R. 7916, was later revised as H.R. 9220.

7. He was referring here to the establishment of a Department of Defense.

8. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 400.

The successful conduct of party management in the House . . . is naturally dependent upon the extent and the reliability of the information possessed by the leaders as to the state of mind in the House. . . . Information is thus obtained . . . sometimes by careful polls of delegations by states, and sometimes through series of conferences which the Floor Leader calls. 9

Having thus concisely summed up his view of the sense of the House of Representatives on proposed air legislation, James then indicated the direction of thinking of the committee leadership, when he posed the following question to Mitchell:

I want to ask you what your idea would be: If you were a member of Congress, now, in our place, I want to ask you whether or not you would stand for something you thought might pass next year or the year afterward, but knowing in advance . . . it would not pass this year; or whether you would take a bill something along the line of Colonel Wainwright [the Patrick bill] and build around that and try to agree on a compromise in this committee that every member . . . could support, and report it out and try to get a rule and pass it? 10

In reply to this question, Mitchell asserted his belief that the Patrick-Wainwright bill (H.R. 8533) was a good one provided that it was accompanied by statutory definitions of Air, Army and Navy missions. Unless such definitions were made by Congress the bill would still leave the Air Service under the control of the War Department, and this, to Mitchell, was an unsatisfactory situation.¹¹

General Patrick had already indicated his willingness to accept something in the way of a compromise if the alternative was to be no legislation at all. And if the committee were to report out

9. George R. Brown, The Leadership of Congress, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1922), pp. 222-223.

10. House Committee on Military Affairs, 1926, Hearings, p. 400.

11. Ibid., p. 401.

a bill that committee leaders were certain would not have the support of the House leadership, then the likely result would be no legislation at all. Also, after cursory hearings, the Senate, by February 27, had received a favorable report from its committee on Military Affairs on S.3321,¹² a bill by Chairman Wadsworth to carry out, at the request of the War Department, the recommendations of the Morrow Board.

On February 19, in a speech in Chicago, General Patrick had further indicated his willingness to give up some of his aims for the time being in exchange for congressional legislation assuring some of the needed changes in the status of the Air Service. He asked the extremist critics and friends of the Air Service to "kindly take a seat" while Congress worked out its own decision. He said, "The decision rests with Congress, which will probably take its stand somewhere between the extremes of the enthusiasts and those who call themselves conservative."¹³

As the House committee neared the end of its public hearings and indicated strong support for one of the proposals for basic change in the Air Service, President Coolidge attempted to exert his influence against drastic action. Through "White House sources" the President let it be known that he was strongly opposed to a large air force. This opposition was represented to be based upon fear that air power expansion by the United States would lead to world-wide competition in aerial armaments, negating the good effects of the Washington Conference and nullifying his efforts to bring

12. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, To Increase the Efficiency of the Air Service, Report No. 224, to accompany S. 3321, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926).

13. Quoted in New York Times (February 20, 1926), Associated Press dispatch from Chicago, p. 4.

about further armament limitation.¹⁴ Coolidge further let it be known again that he favored the moderate proposals of the Morrow Board for strengthening the Air Service, but he would support nothing more ambitious in scope.

In the statement released from the White House Coolidge indicated that he would view with alarm any aircraft expansion program beyond the Morrow Board's recommendations, for such action, he believed, would be the results of agitation by military men contrary to civilian policy, and would threaten to make this a military nation. In the words of the New York Times:

President Coolidge feels confident that the country is not in jeopardy, and that the legislation suggested by the Aircraft [Morrow] Board meets present needs. He believes Congress, now that the agitation for an enlarged air force has subsided, will finally come to the same conclusion. 15

Thus, as the House approached its decision on the major alternatives, members faced the situation in which the Senate had quickly passed an administration-supported and War Department-written bill embodying the Morrow Board recommendations which made no basic change in the defense organization, and President Coolidge had expressed publicly in no uncertain terms that he favored nothing more than the Morrow recommendations. Representative James, it will be recalled, had earlier forecast that a Department of Defense proposal had no chance of getting by the full House, this prediction apparently having been made upon reliable information from the Republican leadership in the House. The Senate, also, was adamantly against any basic change in the national defense structure at this time.

14. New York Times (February 24, 1926), p. 1.

15. Idem.

At the conclusion of six weeks of hearings, the House Committee on March 3 held what a newspaper account described as a "stormy" executive session on the major bills before the committee.¹⁶ In this session the committee rejected the Department of Defense proposal by a vote of eleven to ten.¹⁷ Similarly, the War Department bill, as such, and General Patrick's Air Corps bill were rejected by the same vote. The plan for a Department of Air or "united air service" was soundly defeated in committee by a sixteen to five vote.¹⁸ Newspaper reports indicated that a truce had been made between General Patrick and the War Department, and that General Patrick's proposal, which reportedly had strong support in the committee, failed to pass because of Patrick's change of mind. Patrick and Secretary of War Davis had reportedly worked out a compromise plan calling for an expansion of the Army Air Service in a five-year program, in addition to certain other Morrow Board

16. New York Times (March 4, 1926), p. 23.

17. An unofficial tabulation of how the committee divided on this significant vote has been recorded as follows: For (Republicans): Hill of Maryland, Furlow of Minnesota, Speaks of Ohio, James of Michigan; (Democrats): Hill of Alabama, Garrett of Texas, Boylan of New York, Quin of Mississippi, Vinson of Kentucky and McSwain of South Carolina. Against (Republicans): Morin of Pennsylvania, Ransley of Pennsylvania, Wurzbach of Texas, Reece of Tennessee, Glynn of Connecticut, Johnson of Indiana, Frothingham of Massachusetts, Wainwright of New York, Wheeler of Illinois; (Democrats): Fisher of Tennessee and Wright of Georgia. This tabulation was reported by George S. Carll, Jr., in "Congress Will Be Guided by Morrow Report," U.S. Air Services, XI (April, 1926), 21. See also Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., LXVII, speech of Representative James, (May 5, 1926), 8751; also New York Times (March 4, 1926), p. 23.

18. New York Times (March 4, 1926), p. 23. This report had further indicated that an informal poll taken of the committee the previous day had shown a majority of one in favor of a Department of Defense, with one member apparently changing his position overnight.

recommendations. Secretary of War Davis was reported as stating that this new plan had been approved by him and concurred in by General Patrick as well as by the Chief of Staff, General Hines. It was an aircraft development program, the goal of which the War Department would work toward for five years "to the extent that financial considerations permit;"¹⁹ This was a significant qualification in the days of Coolidge austerity.

The next day it was reported that Chairman Morin of the House Military Committee had visited President Coolidge who had indicated his approval of the new War Department compromise bill, which was in effect the Morrow Board recommendations with supplemental provisions increasing the actual size of the Air Service.²⁰ Editorially the New York Times commented that General Patrick had "made his peace with the War Department, being satisfied that its five-year plan was a fair exchange."²¹

It is clear that the House Committee, in the face of outside opposition, had been willing to agree finally that what compromise there was to be made would be made between the moderate proposals of General Patrick for a semi-independent Air Service and the administration's insistence upon nothing more than the Morrow Board's recommendations. It seems likely that the administration realized at the time that in its acceptance of this "compromise" which allowed expansion of the Air Service within a five-year period, it was in fact yielding little, for such an expansion might be authorized by Congress but appropriations for its fulfillment in future years might not necessarily materialize.

19. Idem.

20. New York Times (March 4, 1926), Associated Press dispatch from Washington, p. 11.

21. New York Times (March 5, 1926), p. 20.

The next day, in fact, President Coolidge issued a statement which definitely qualified his previous approval of the compromise plan. Greatly concerned about the effect the five-year Army air program²² might have on his economy and tax reduction plans for the coming year, he made public his opposition to the five-year aircraft development proposal as it had been agreed upon by the War Department, the Air Service and the House Military Affairs Committee.²³ Coolidge indicated that it was his administration's attitude that economies rather than expensive development programs should be initiated by the Congress. A balanced budget and reduced taxation were the predominant aims of his administration. The President made it clear that if the air services were to be strengthened, it would have to be done by reducing the strength of some other branch of the defense establishment. He was opposed to increasing the size of the military establishment, but would not oppose transfers from one service to another for the purpose of increasing the efficiency of the air service.²⁴

This clarification of the administration's stand on further development of the air service was perhaps a bitter disappointment to Air Service supporters who felt they had given up much in return for what now seemed to be empty promises. Yet it was up to the House Military Committee now to adapt the War Department compromise bill to the realities of the situation. The committee proceeded to "draft its own bill" in the words of Representative James.²⁵

For one, Mitchell was disappointed, if not surprised, at the turn of events. Surveying the situation in Congress, he wrote,

22. The Navy also was pushing a five-year aircraft development plan.

23. See New York Times (March 6, 1926), p. 5.

24. Idem.

25. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., LXVII, 8751.

In spite of the excellent bills that have been presented to Congress and heard before the Military Affairs Committee, the constant importuning which the Army and Navy lobbies and their propaganda agencies have caused to be made to the President, the Congress and the press, has had its effect. . . . When the bills for the improvement of our National Defense were first taken up, the majority of members of the House Military Affairs Committee were favorable to the creation of a Department of National Defense. . . . This excellent measure was defeated in the committee, because just before the vote was taken, the Army and Navy lobbyists got hold of one member of the Committee and made him change his vote. 26

Mitchell by this time had realized that his fight again had been lost, at least in this session of Congress.

The bill that emerged from the committee as its "own bill" was H.R. 10827, which was, actually, a refurbished version of the War Department Bill (H.R. 7916) which had been presented earlier to carry out the Morrow Board recommendations. This "committee" bill, however, did show the effects of a compromise between the air enthusiasts on the committee and the administration supporters. Some of the details of the Morrow Report had been made more positive, and a five-year development program had been added which was more ambitious than either the War Department or President would have initiated on their own. H.R. 10827 was reported out of committee on March 29, 1926.²⁷

This bill contained the following important provisions: Change the name from Air Service to Air Corps; three brigadier generals

26. Typed manuscript, undated, possibly for syndicated column, ca. March 1926, in Mitchell Papers.

27. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs, To Provide More Effectively for the National Defense, Report No. 700 to accompany H.R. 10827, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926).

instead of one, two of whom shall be flying officers; ninety per cent of Air Service officers shall be flyers; provision for enlisted men as pilots; increased rank and pay for air mechanics; temporary rank for Air Corps officers; study of possible corrections needed in the promotion list; provision for air sections on the General Staff; flight pay to be permanent; a five-year Air Corps development program, which at the end would have added 403 officers and 6,240 enlisted men to the actual strength of the Air Corps, bringing the strength to 1,650 officers and 15,000 enlisted men;²⁸ at the end of five years the Air Corps should have 2,200 aircraft, thus enabling a "substantial increase" in the air components at Panama and Hawaii; and provision for an Assistant Secretary of War for Air.²⁹

It is clear that this bill was merely a slight embellishment of the Morrow Board's report. In the committee report, each section was explained, and most of the sections were illustrated with quotations from the Morrow Report.³⁰ In the words of the report, however, it was noted that the committee "has endeavored to incorporate in the measure herewith reported as many of the desirable features suggested [in the hearings, bills, and reports studied by the committee] consistent with what a majority of the committee feel to be for the best interests of national defense as a whole."³¹ A comparison of the reported bill with the Morrow Report, however, will show changes designed to mitigate the air enthusiasts in and outside the committee,

28. This strength was authorized in the National Defense Act of 1920 but had never been realized because of meager appropriations.

29. For the full text of H.R. 10827, see House Report No. 700, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 14-17.

30. See House Report No. 700, pp. 1-14.

31. Ibid , p. 2.

especially in the details of the five-year development program. As the report observed, "Some members of your committee do not agree to some of the provisions of the measure as reported, but all agree that the individual view can not always prevail."³² In other words, Congress was told by the committee, "This is the best we could do," and the bill's passage as a whole was urged.

32. *Idem.*

CHAPTER XIX

CONGRESS PASSES A BILL

Floor consideration of H.R. 10827 took place on May 5, as the House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for consideration of the bill. The bill was discussed, rather than debated, at this stage, in the absence of any partisanship, and also apparently in the absence of most members of the House. A division on a minor amendment showed only thirty-eight members, or less than eight per cent of the total membership, present and voting. This did not seem to indicate that the public was "aroused" on the issue; at least not if House attendance reflects public interest.

Sponsor of the bill on the House floor was Representative James who told his colleagues, "Personally I was in favor of a department of national defense, as I believe that is the only logical solution of the problem. We were defeated in committee."¹

James then proceeded to explain each section of the bill, asserting that it "will alleviate most of the grievances of the fliers who have been coming before Congress since 1919 . . . will provide an adequate flying service in time of peace, and I sincerely hope it will pass the House by a practically unanimous vote. (Applause)."² He introduced into the Record a letter from General Patrick, whose opinion on the bill had been solicited and who wrote:

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1. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., LXVII, 8751.
 2. Idem.

. . . while I still feel that a department of national defense is the ultimate solution of our defense problem, I am nevertheless in hearty accord with the general provisions of this bill. . . . I believe it is a long step in the right direction and will materially increase the efficiency of the Army Air Corps. 3

Other members of the committee took the floor and in a routine fashion traced the history of military air policies and legislative proposals. It was continually stressed that this was an issue which had been before the Congress since 1919, and one on which several members of the committee from both parties had given considerable attention. One of these members, Representative Hubert Fisher, Democrat of Tennessee, succinctly described the purpose of the bill in these words: ". . . the providing of methods by legislation to bring about a greater efficiency in the air activities of the Army without doing injustice to the other branches."⁴

Representative LaGuardia, usually a fire-eating exponent of air power development and prime accuser of the "backwardness" of the General Staff, took the floor and with unusual calmness asserted, "I realize that under the circumstances it is the best bill that could be reported from the committee." But he made it clear, in moderate tones, that this was not the bill he would have reported from committee; it was, to him, not the "logical solution of the problem, that of a department of national defense," but it did "provide and remedy to some extent existing evils now in the Air Service of the Army."⁵ With this it was now clear that the fight for any more drastic change of the defense establishment in the 69th Congress was over.

3. Major General Mason M. Patrick to Hon. W. Frank James (May 4, 1926), in idem.

4. Ibid., p. 8753.

5. Ibid., p. 8754.

Speaking at length on the bill, Representative Fred M. Vinson, Democrat of Kentucky, observed that the measure under discussion had carried out the "major portion" of the Morrow Board's recommendations. He expressed belief that "the birth of the Morrow Board was mainly due to the desire to counteract the psychological effect produced throughout the country by the destruction of the Shenandoah and the astounding charges made by General Mitchell."⁶ Even so, he thought the board's conclusions merited, in the main, acceptance by Congress.

Expounding on air power, Vinson declared:

I am not one of those who have yet reached the point where I believe that the air forces of today, or on the morrow, will be the sole determining factor in war. . . . There is no doubt in my mind but that they will have this mission of offense, which will bring to light the most horrible of weapons to be used against both the military and the civilian. 7

Further, Vinson stated, "My present view is that aircraft is the most potent weapon which Thor, the god of war, has yet invented. It has revolutionized wars." It was clear from these remarks, and the statements of other Congressmen, that Mitchell's theories of air power had worked their way into the thinking of at least some of the national representatives. Vinson stated: "Our country owes a debt of gratitude to . . . General Mitchell" to whom he implicitly gave considerable credit for the aircraft bill now under consideration, which he termed the "first definite air policy for the Army."⁸

There followed a brief discussion and the submission of minor amendments by various other members. Representative Daniel Garrett,

6. Ibid., p. 8756.

7. Idem.

8. Ibid., p. 8757.

Democrat of Texas, tried to include an amendment requiring that all three of the brigadier generals in the Air Service be flying officers instead of the bill's two, but this failed on a division showing sixteen ayes and twenty-two noes. LaGuardia commented that unless this amendment were adopted "the flying service would not have a Chinaman's chance of getting a brigadier general who is a flyer in that position."⁹ Representative George L. Schafer, Republican of Wisconsin, then offered a motion to recommit the bill, observing that he was against the bill as long as it did not contain an amendment requiring that all three Air Corps brigadier generals be flyers, but this failed by a vote of thirty-nine to seven.¹⁰ The bill was then passed by voice vote, the discussion having consumed only seventeen pages in the Congressional Record.¹¹ No roll-call votes were taken on this measure, and it was passed in essentially the same form in which it had been reported out of committee. Debate was friendly and routine, displaying no particular political party differences.

H.R. 10827, having passed the House of Representatives on May 5, was sent to the Senate where it was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs. By May 10 the Senate Committee had issued a report, having substituted this bill for the one it had previously approved, S.3321. This report recommended that H.R. 10827 pass the Senate, but contained several amendments to the House bill. These amendments included: elimination of the provision for increased pay for enlisted mechanics; elimination of the statutory provision for air sections on the General Staff; elimination of a provision

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9. Congressional Record, LXVII, 8765.
 10. Ibid., p. 8767.
 11. Ibid., pp. 8750-8767.

authorizing ten lighter-than-air ships; and other relatively minor changes in some of the House bill's provisions.¹² The Senate committee's rapid action on the House version of the Air Corps bill, even though it had included some debatable amendments, promised that the bill would pass substantially as it had come from the House committee, unless there were unforeseen developments, or unless further amendments on the floor of the Senate changed the fundamental nature of the bill. This, however, did not seem likely.

The bill came up for floor consideration in the Senate on June 1, with Senator Hiram Bingham, who, it will be recalled, was one of the most active members of the Morrow Board, handling the bill. The Senate Military Committee, from its earlier actions, had indicated close sympathy with the views of the Administration and more specifically the War Department, on the issue of military aircraft policy. Thus it is likely that the amendments offered by the Senate committee were inspired by the War Department. There was considerable contrast between the enthusiasm in the House committee for the views of the air radicals, and the lack of enthusiasm in the Senate committee with regard to these views, and a decided tendency in the Senate committee to support the War Department's position.

Senate debate on H.R. 10827 for the most part dwelt upon the Senate committee amendments to the House bill. Debate was somewhat more lively and controversial than had been the House discussion. Debate on the bill was chiefly between Senator Bingham and Senator

12. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, To Increase the Efficiency of the Army Air Service, Report No. 830, to accompany H.R. 10827, 69th Congress, 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), pp. 1-2.

Joseph T. Robinson, Democrat of Arkansas and junior minority member of the Senate Military Committee. It is apparent that in general Bingham was speaking as an ally of the War Department and Robinson was an Air Service spokesman. This fact became clear in the course of discussions between them on the Senate committee amendments to H.R. 10827 and additional amendments offered by Robinson.

But the amendments which these two Senators debated were for the most part inconsequential. One of them, for example, dealt with the question of whether, in time of war, an officer who was not a member of the flying Air Corps could be appointed Chief of the Air Service. The Senate committee and Bingham were sponsoring an amendment which would allow the President to appoint a Chief in time of war who was not a member of the Air Service. Indirect War Department sponsorship of this amendment, the debate revealed, grew out of an apparent distrust of the capabilities of Air Service officers in high executive positions as a result of the experience in the World War.¹³ Robinson's attempt to change this provision was defeated.¹⁴

Another issue on which much of the debate centered was the question of higher pay for airplane mechanics. The House bill had included a provision that would have allowed enlisted mechanics in the Air Service to achieve a rating allowing them as high as forty per cent increase in pay. The Senate committee wished to strike out this portion of the House bill. Senator Bingham voiced the committee's objection to this because, he said, it would, among other

13. For discussion of this amendment, see Congressional Record, LXVII, 10403-10404.

14. Ibid., p. 10405.

things, permit the airplane mechanic "to receive a pay greater than that of a captain in the Army."¹⁵ Arguing against this Senate amendment, Robinson declared,

There has been a strange and, to me, unaccountable indifference in military circles to the necessity for efficiency in the air. . . . If we are ever going to wake up to the value of a strong and efficient Air Service, the dawn has come, and we ought to become aroused. 16

Bingham countered with the statement that Air Service mechanics should not receive pay so high that the civilian aircraft industry would be unable to lure them away from the Army with higher pay.¹⁷ By this time it had become apparent that opposition to the Senate leadership on this measure was without sufficient strength. The committee amendment was quickly adopted.¹⁸

A minor argument in connection with the bill developed on the question of whether the inclusion of air sections on the General Staff should be provided by statutory authority, or carried out, as the Morrow Board had recommended, simply by War Department administrative order. The Senate committee amended the House bill in line with the Morrow Board's recommendation. Senator Robinson favored statutory provision, but again was defeated.¹⁹ Practically all of the debate centered on matters such as these, with Senator Bingham supporting modifications to provisions of the House bill which had gone beyond the Morrow Board recommendations or which had been written into the bill without War Department endorsement.

15. Ibid., p. 10407.

16. Idem.

17. Ibid., p. 10408.

18. Ibid., p. 10409.

19. Ibid., p. 10410.

At one point in the debate over eligibility of officers for the position as Chief of Air Service, Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr., Republican of New York and chairman of the Senate Military Committee, gave vent to his irritation over "lobbying" by interested Air Service officers. He stated:

Since the beginning of our consideration of this bill it has been perfectly apparent that there is a special little group of Air Service officers, of the rank of colonel and lieutenant-colonel, who would like to have Congress legislate in such a fashion that they and only they shall be eligible for these extraordinary promotions. . . . They have been coming to Senators and members of the House asking that amendments of this sort be put in so as to freeze into the law the certainty of their future promotions. It is not the first time I have encountered lobbies of this kind in my experience with military legislation. . . . But this bill does not set them up as an exclusive club. 20

This issue of the eligibility for appointment as Chief of Air Service developed into the only instance in the entire legislative process under consideration until the final House vote in which a question was put to a roll call vote. Briefly, the issue was whether the law should read that appointment as Air Service chief should be made of an officer who was a qualified pilot, regardless of his branch of the service, or whether the officer should be a long-standing "member" of the Air Service. The Senate committee, on the argument that it did not wish to bind the hands of the President in this appointment, favored the former, more liberal provision. Air Service officers understandably were insisting that the appointment, by statute, must come from "one of their own." The Senate committee amendment was

20. Ibid , p. 10498.

carried by a vote of thirty-three yeas to twenty-three nays, with forty senators not voting. A tabulation shows this to have been an almost strictly party division. All those voting yea were Republicans with the exception of Morris Sheppard of Texas. All those voting "No" were Democrats with the exception of Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., Progressive Republican of Wisconsin.²¹

This was, in general, the tenor of the debate in the Senate. The Republican leadership, with Senator Bingham handling the floor action, was well in command of the situation. Senator Robinson, leading the "opposition" in a manner showing close allegiance to the Air Service, was able to do no more in his fight than present his opposition "for the record." The bill was read and passed by voice vote on June 2, 1926.²²

It seemed likely that the House would disagree with at least some of the Senate amendments. On June 4 Representative James indicated the House's disagreement with the Senate's amendments to H.R. 10827 and requested a conference to iron out the House-Senate discrepancies. The Speaker appointed James, and Representatives John Philip Hill, Harry Wurzbach, Republicans, and Representative Percy Quin, ranking House Military Committee member, and John J. McSwain, as conferees.²³

Conferees from the Senate who met with the House conferees named above to iron out the discrepancies in H.R. 10827 as passed by the House and by the Senate, were James W. Wadsworth, Jr., Hiram Bingham, and Morris Sheppard, Democrat of Texas.²⁴

Meanwhile, another question which had consumed a good part of previous hearings on the aircraft problem had not as yet been dealt with by the House and Senate Military Committees. This was the question of

21. Ibid., p. 10500.

22. Ibid., p. 10501.

23. Ibid., (June 4, 1925), p. 10715.

24. Sheppard was to develop later a reputation as a leading air enthusiast in the Senate.

aircraft procurement and included the point of competitive bidding for government aircraft contracts. This issue, involving some of the technical aspects of aircraft procurement, revolved around the question of whether the government in procuring military aircraft should adhere to the standard practice of awarding contracts to the lowest bidder. Such a practice involved, many committee members felt, the risk of obtaining inferior aircraft. It was argued that "You don't buy aircraft the way you buy soap, from the lowest bidder."²⁵ But the idea of having what amounted to "favored" aircraft manufacturers was, in the eyes of some legislators, a dangerous practice. While the debate on more basic aircraft problems was taking place, proposals were being made to deal specifically with this particular problem. Both the Morrow Board and Lampert Committee had, incidentally, recommended that a flexible, "liberal" arrangement prevail in the procurement of aircraft, without necessitating the award of contract to the lowest bidder.²⁶ One such proposal, in the form of a bill, H.R. 12471, was favorably reported out of committee and included a provision allowing the Secretary of War discretionary powers in awarding aircraft contracts. The bill dealt in detail with the problems of the aircraft industry and government procurement of aircraft, and its specific provisions do not concern us here.

The problems of commercial aviation, and of the aircraft manufacturing industry, were of course a vital part of the aviation issue. It goes without saying that the state of development and status of commercial aviation and civilian aircraft industry were a major concern to those considering the role of aircraft in national defense. As already suggested, much of the congressional and other study of the aircraft industry centered on this aspect of the problem. Congress dealt

25. Interview with Fred M. Vinson, April 15, 1953.

26. See Morrow Board, Report, p. 29; Lampert Committee, Report, p. 8.

with many of the recommendations of the Lampert Committee and Morrow Board in this regard in the passage of the Bingham-Parker bill,²⁷ approved on May 20, 1926 by the President and designed to encourage commercial aviation.²⁸

The matter of aircraft procurement was dealt with by an appointed five-man subcommittee from both the House Military and Naval Affairs Committees. After weeks of hearings, this informal group reached a conclusion which allowed discretion on the part of government officials responsible for aircraft bids, but focused the light of publicity on all of their proceedings.²⁹ Statutory provisions to this effect were to be included in the deliberations of the conferees on H.R. 10827 in the form of an amendment.

As is often the case, the meeting and deliberations of the House and Senate "managers" on H.R. 10827 were the final significant steps in the particular decision-making process under consideration. In a general way, the House and Senate managers in this meeting can be said to be representing two different clientels. As suggested earlier, the Senate Military Committee adhered more closely to the administration view on the aircraft issue than did the House committee, with the latter, in general, more friendly to the views of the air enthusiasts. Three of the House conferees had been ardent advocates of basic changes in the national defense establishment. In fact, Representatives James, Hill, and McSwain had all introduced bills before their committee calling for unification of the armed forces, and

27. The Air Commerce Act, U.S. Statutes at Large, XLIV, 568-576. A Bureau of Civilian Aviation was created in the Department of Commerce.

28. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs, To Encourage Development of Aviation, Report No. 1395 to accompany H.R. 12471, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926).

29. See Congressional Record, LXVII, 12259 ff.

all but one of the House conferees had voted in committee for a Department of Defense. The Senate committee "managers" could all be classed as interested in the further development of American air power, but were on record against any basic organizational changes for that purpose.

One might have predicted, reading the list of House and Senate managers, as they began deliberation and compromise on the Senate-House disagreements, that whatever compromise took place was likely to favor the air power enthusiasts, that is to say, the House version of H.R. 10827. And this, in fact, turned out to be the case.

In this regard, when the conference report on the bill was called up for House consideration, usually the final step in the legislative process, Representative Lister Hill, Democrat of Alabama, proudly declared:

. . . when the bill passed the Senate it had been so mutilated and was so weakened by that mutilation that it could be scarcely recognized, and yet our conferees bring it to us today just as good and to all intents and purposes the same as when it passed this House. Our conferees won every point in conference, and I feel that they merit the congratulations of the House. 30

It is clear from the record that most of the compromises made in the conference were in the direction of the House version of the bill. For example, on the question of higher ratings and pay for Air Corps enlisted men, the final version was similar to the House proposal, although pay scales were somewhat modified. Also, on the issue of eligibility for appointment as Air Service chief, the bill called for a person with flying experience and "extended service" in the Air

30. Congressional Record, LXVII, 11990.

Service. The creation of air sections in the General Staff was made a statutory provision, with the House version, again, prevailing.³¹

The only House debate on the conference report involved the last minute inclusion of Amendment No. 30 dealing with aircraft procurement regulations. In something of an unusual legislative procedure, this amendment, which was almost a separate piece of legislation in itself, was included in the bill in conference. This section had passed the House as a separate bill, but it was apparent that Congress would adjourn before it could go through all the legislative steps, so the conferees had resorted to this device. A point of order raised by one representative against the inclusion in the bill in conference of provisions dealing with naval aircraft procurement was sustained as being beyond the jurisdiction of the House Military Committee.³² Otherwise the only remaining legislative consideration of the bill in the House was explanatory remarks concerning the actions of the conferees, particularly on this question of the last-minute inclusion of the section dealing with aircraft procurement.³³

The concluding remarks in the House were given by Representative McSwain, who, as noted earlier, would have established a Department of Defense in preference to the legislation now in its last stages of legislative action. But judging from his remarks, he considered that all had not been lost in the process. He declared:

31. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Conference Report, House Report No. 1527 to accompany H.R. 10827, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926). For "Statement of the Managers on the Part of the House," see ibid., pp. 12-14.

32. Congressional Record, LXVII, 11984.

33. See ibid., pp. 12254 ff.

Gentlemen when we came here in December there was an organized program to put the Morrow recommendation over. The War Department was behind it, and the Navy Department was behind it. Every power and influence seemed behind it. A few little fellows, however, have stood at Thermopylae and have brought in here a bill that will promote aviation and stimulate inventive genius, and put this country foremost, in my humble judgement, over all the world in the development of the aircraft industry to come. 34

Following this statement, the question was taken on the adoption of the conference report. With a recorded vote, there were 256 yeas and twelve nays on the question of its adoption. This vote, in itself, was obviously of little significance.³⁵

A week earlier the Senate had briefly considered the conference report on the bill and quickly passed it with a voice vote. Senator Wadsworth informed the Senate that a number of the Senate amendments had been modified in the conference, but assured the Senators that "in import and intent the changes are very slight."³⁶ After a very short and superficial dialogue between Wadsworth and Senator Joseph T. Robinson, the motion for the adoption of the conference report was adopted by the Senate.³⁷ As in the case of the House, final passage of the bill in the Senate was a relatively meaningless step in the legislative procedure.

34. Ibid., p. 12261. McSwain was trying to win here a verbal victory, for in fact the Morrow Board's recommendations had been "put over" with only relatively minor alterations and additions.

35. Ibid., p. 12261. For a copy of the bill, as passed, and explanatory remarks, letters and other comment, see "Extension of Remarks," Conference Report on H.R. 10827 in ibid., pp. 12268-12279.

36. Ibid., p. 11756.

37. Idem.

There followed the routine signature of the bills by the Speaker of the House and the Vice President, as President of the Senate.³⁸ On July 3, two days after H.R. 10827 had been presented to the President for his approval,³⁹ the House was informed that on the preceding day the President had signed the bill, it becoming Public Law No. 446.⁴⁰

The bill which became law with the President's signature on July 2, 1926 - The Air Corps Act - might well have been called the Morrow Act. For, in the words of the acting chairman of the House Military Committee, the bill "embodies practically all the recommendations made by the President's Aircraft Board, together with certain other legislation which seemed appropriate at this time."⁴¹ What changes and redefinitions were made in the legislative process in this case were, for the most part, in the general direction of the views of the air enthusiasts, and were the direct result of strong sympathy toward their views in the House Committee on Military Affairs. But the act bears the distinct imprint of the Morrow Board report, a report growing out of a detailed study made, without congressional authorization, on the initiative of the President and War and Navy Departments. President Coolidge's advice to make "no radical change in organization of the service" was heeded. And the changes in Army aviation policy that were prescribed in the act seemed designed to mitigate the "grievances" of Air Service personnel in order to bring an end to the "agitation" for basic changes, i.e., separation, in organization.

38. June 30, 1926. See Congressional Record, LXVII, 12460, 12463.

39. Ibid., p. 12558.

40. Ibid., p. 13092.

41. W.F. James in Congressional Record, LXVII (June 29, 1926), 12273. For additional post-factum remarks by James, see his article, "A Five-Year Development Program for the Air Corps at Last," U.S. Air Services, XI (July, 1926), 11-14, 45-47.

The major provisions of the act⁴² as it was finally approved were as follows:

1. The name of the Air Service was changed to Air Corps.
2. Two additional brigadier generals were added; and the authorized strength remained at 1,514 officers and 16,000 enlisted men.
3. It was stipulated that ninety per cent of the officers must be flyers, and that flying units must in all cases be commanded by flying officers.
4. On or after July 1, 1929, not less than twenty per cent of total number of pilots were to be enlisted men, leaving some discretion in this matter with the Secretary of War.
5. Higher ratings and pay were authorized for up to fourteen per cent of the enlisted strength for aviation mechanics.
6. Temporary rank was authorized in necessary cases, with the limit of two grades higher than permanent rank .
7. The Secretary of War was directed to have study made of the promotion list, such study to be submitted to the next session of Congress in December.
8. Statutory provision was made for air sections in each division of the General Staff, for a period of three years subsequent to July 1, 1926.
9. Appointment as Chief of Air Corps was to be made from officers of at least fifteen years' service, with "actual and extended" service in the Air Corps. This provision was to expire at the end of seven years.
10. A five-year development program was authorized, calling for an ultimate increase of 403 officers and 6,240 enlisted men. This expansion was to be distributed over the five-year period, with not

42. Public Law No. 446, 69th Cong., July 2, 1926, 44 Stat. 780.

more than one-fifth of the increase being made in the first year, commencing July 1, 1926. Also, at the end of the period the Air Corps would have 1,800 "serviceable" airplanes.

11. An additional Assistant Secretary of War "to aid the Secretary of War in fostering military aviation" was authorized.

12. Extensive details were written into the statute providing for methods of aircraft procurement, including the modification of the previous rules for awarding contracts to the lowest bidder.

13. A soldier's medal for heroism, and a distinguished flying cross were authorized, together with additional pay of two dollars per month to accompany such awards.

These were the main points of the legislation decided upon in the spring of 1926 as a result of the long and sometimes acrimonious controversy over national military air policy. The direct source of most of the details of this new aviation policy are relatively obvious.⁴³ As already suggested, the dominant source of such policy was the Morrow Board. But also, as in the case of most congressional legislation, there were the indirect sources of such policy which must be analyzed in order to have a better knowledge of the legislative process. It has been shown here that Congress has "made a law" regarding military aviation, and in doing so has, superficially, at least, carried out its constitutional authority to "raise and support armies" and "To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces."⁴⁴ What can be concluded about the decision-making process from the preceding description of the post-World War debates and decisions on military air policy? What were the influences and roles of the background and setting, the major actors in the process, and the intellectual outlook of the decision-makers?

43. For a graphic picture of the legislative history of various sections of the act, see Appendix.

44. United States Constitution, Art. I, Sec. 8.

The following concluding chapter will attempt to synthesize the data presented above, and to analyze the conclusions drawn from the preceding description of congressional formulation of military air policy in the years following the first World War.

CONCLUSIONS

The Air Corps Act of 1926 was designed, according to its language, "To provide more effectively for the national defense by increasing the efficiency of the Air Corps."¹ One of the prime responsibilities of government is to provide for the common defense, this being listed in the Preamble to the United States Constitution as one of the purposes for the foundation of American national government.

In accordance with the American constitutional principle of separation of powers, Congress was given the legislative authority to establish military forces and to provide for their maintenance and governance. The President, on the other hand, was made commander in chief of such Army and Navy as the Congress should provide. The President was also given the duty of recommending to Congress such measures as he deems necessary for the national welfare, including military policies. Congress clearly has the constitutional authority to determine military policy, and this authority is, in law, "full and plenary," but it is in reality shared with the President and therefore with the President's agents in the executive departments. In fact, it can be argued that the congressional power to determine national military policies has been increasingly vitiated by the growing power of the Presidency, particularly in international affairs, and because of the heightening complexity of the machinery and techniques for carrying out military policy.

1. 44 Stat. 780.

In 1926, however, President Coolidge paid verbal tribute, at least, to a traditional principle when he said, "The amount and kind of our military equipment is preeminently a question for the decision of Congress, after giving due consideration to the advice of military experts and the available public revenue."²

The preceding pages have described in detail the background, setting and main events leading up to and resulting in the passage of the Air Corps Act. From a detailed study of these factors, what can be concluded about the congressional role in determining military policy? What part did Congress play in the decision-making process by which the act was passed? What has this study revealed about how Congress has exercised its authority to determine military policy? If military policy was, in the words of Coolidge, "preeminently a question for the decision of Congress," was Congress the principal decision-making area in the passage of the Air Corps Act?

The background of any major piece of legislation such as this is an almost infinite complex of sources. No study of limited scope and purpose can trace a particular act to its ultimate source, nor even explore all the ramifications of the legislative process. But it is all important to keep in mind that the legislative process is, in fact, action within a broad context of American society, and not solely confined to the legislative chambers and committee rooms of Congress. Therefore much space in this study has been devoted to a description of the general setting of the period in which the decisions under consideration were reached, in an attempt to suggest the social context in which the action took place.

2. Message of the President to Congress, December 7, 1926, reprinted in Foreign Relations, 1926, I, xxiii.

In general terms, the major issue before the decision-makers was whether or not the development of aviation called for a fundamental change in the doctrines, techniques, and organization for national security. Technological advancement of aeronautics continued throughout the period under study, keeping the issue continually before the decision-makers. Yet the legislative process which has been described was more than simply a battle between groups who held that the airplane was a weapon capable of independent employment in war and those who saw it as merely an auxiliary military device. The process was, instead, a complex struggle for and against institutional change by the contending groups or their agents.

The primary goal of the decision-makers was the preservation of national security; the protection of the national interest. Yet it is at once obvious that definitions of these concepts such as national security and national interest varied from group to group, and often within groups. The chief actors, or "contestants,"^{2a} in the decision-making process were human beings with complex personal motivations, various socially defined roles, and differing intellectual skills for defining the national interest. Any analysis of decision-making in a period over twenty-five years past must inevitably suffer from lack of access to data which would reveal more fully such motivations, roles and skills. But it may be assumed that the personal interest of individuals in the case under study was generally intertwined motivationally with a particular concept of national security. From the empirical study that has been made in the preceding pages much can be surmised, and the major outlines of the principal factors in the decision-making process can be set forth.

2a. This term is borrowed from Bertram Gross. See his The Legislative Struggle, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), p. 17 ff.

The legislative process resulting in the Air Corps Act was, in effect, a struggle for institutional change in which some of the participants were members of "vested interest" groups, while others may be classed as "innovators," or in fact "radicals," attempting to alter the existing institutions. In this setting the Congress was playing the role of both a composite group of contestants representing the various groups contending for power, and at the same time performing the special role of "referee" or "broker," with the constitutional authority, if not the competence or the power, to make a final determination of the issue.

A glance at the chart showing the legislative history of some major sections of the Air Corps Act³ reveals, on close scrutiny, the interplay of forces in the legislative process and the composite nature of groups within Congress. For example, the Morrow Board suggested that air sections be created, administratively, in the General Staff. Accordingly, the bill as presented to the House and Senate committees by the War Department⁴ contained no legislative provision for such air sections. However, in the House Military Committee, where there was strong Air Service support, it was felt that it was advisable to give the Air Corps representation on the General Staff a legislative status, and such a provision was thus included in the House bill as reported and passed by the House. The Senate, however, its Military Committee generally supporting the vested interests of the War Department, eliminated the statutory provision for General Staff representation. In the final and crucial stage of legislative procedure, the conference, the House version prevailed. The House conferees, generally in sympathy

3. See Appendix.

4. H.R. 7916 and S.3321.

with the air enthusiasts, had forced a modification of the stand of those representing the vested interests. Thus the Congress, although in part a composite group of vested interests, also played the role of referee in a contest of conflicting interests.

A Struggle for Institutional Change

The established military and naval doctrines of the United States forces were challenged by the advent of military aviation. The Army and Navy were well established social institutions with well patterned habits of social behavior. The hierarchical structure of military establishments produces a highly conformist pattern of action on the part of most of its members. In the face of the aviation challenge, these institutions mobilized in defense of the established system and were able to marshal a combination of powerful forces to prevent any fundamental alteration of the status quo. Such alteration could have been accomplished through legislative fiat.

In order to analyze what occurred in the passage of the Air Corps Act, it has been necessary to present a descriptive account from which the motivational forces operating on the various contestants can be surmised, as well as a description of the setting in which such forces operated. Illustrated in this description has been what may be called a "vested interest" type of institutional behavior.⁵

The Army and Navy establishments comprised an institutional system in which existed an interrelated system of vested interests. This system extended, in reality, into the office of the President, who had to rely on the Army and Navy, through his civilian secretaries, for information, and into both houses of Congress where certain legislators,

5. For a sociological development of a similar concept, see Talcott Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory, Pure and Applied, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), especially his chapter "The Problem of Controlled Institutional Change," pp. 310-345.

for various reasons, identified with and supported these vested interests. Such an institutional system, therefore, contained elements of stability which had to be dealt with by the air radicals in order to achieve the fundamental changes they desired. The air radicals found themselves up against the virtual stone wall of a stabilized system, with its interrelated system of vested interests. The leading air radical, Mitchell, had a realization of this, perhaps unconscious, when he commented that "Changes in military systems come about only through the pressure of public opinion or disaster in war."⁶

As has been indicated, the attempts of the air radicals to modify the main elements of stability in the Army-Navy systems not only produced an outcry of protest based on technical arguments, but also aroused moral indignation as well. Illustrative of this was the Army and Navy's reaction to the suggested techniques of "strategic bombing" as a new and independent mission for an air force, and attendant concepts of total war. The traditional type of warfare had a claim of legitimacy which aerial warfare could not claim in the eyes of the defenders of the status quo.⁷

It is clear that the Army and Navy, on the one hand, and the air radicals and enthusiasts, on the other, had different definitions of the national defense situation, definitions which were motivated in part at least by their self-interests. The Army-Navy's institutionalized definitions of the needs for national defense and their own respective roles therein remained fundamentally unchanged in the face

6. Mitchell, Winged Defense, p. xviii.

7. It is interesting to speculate, for example, on the motivations behind the opinions which have been expressed by Admiral Arthur Radford, appointed chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1953. See, for example, "Radford's Strategy Views," by Hanson W. Baldwin, New York Times (June 4, 1953), p. 6.

of the air power challenge. Feeling the threat to their own professional security, they tightened their ideological hold on existing doctrines and searched for rationalizations to support these doctrines.

In the Army, for example, there was an emotional attachment to the Cavalry, or the Infantry or Artillery, on the part of most leaders. In the Navy the same type of attachment had been made in the battleship or other traditional types of ships. A similar emotional investment in aircraft prevailed, of course, among the members of the Air Service. A "vested interest" concept thus provides a key to the problem of rigidity in the institutions under study, because this concept partially explains some of the more outward patterns of behavior appearing in particular groups, in their resistance to change or threats of change. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the same persons, especially in some of the contesting groups, such as the Congress, play a variety of roles as members of different groups.⁸ Therefore, it is clear that a Republican or Democratic member of a congressional military committee was a member of more structurally interdependent groups than an Army general or Navy admiral would normally be.

Sources of the Act

The Air Corps Act had its main sources in the Morrow Board Report, the House Military Committee, and the Senate-House Conference, in that order. The Morrow Board was established by the President mainly to "steal a march" on Mitchell and an unpredictable Congress. The Morrow Board membership, and its findings, represented in effect the vested interests of the Army and Navy against change. Aviation threatened to

8. For a full discussion of these concepts, see Parsons, op. cit., especially pp. 315 ff.

upset the patterns of thought, the institutionalized structure and well-established practices, and the power relationships of the admirals and generals. Thus, though they felt their motives were basically "loyalty and patriotism" they were nonetheless very likely motivated as well by a fear of an organizational and doctrinal revolution. This fear was reflected in the findings of the Morrow Board.

The Army and Navy, afraid of the organizational revolution threatened by the advent of aviation, resorted to an expression of humanitarian principles of warfare. They were, for example, against a theory of strategic bombing, and this opposition, they claimed, was based on humanitarian grounds. One wonders, however, if a naval captain would refrain in warfare from shelling a vital seacoast city on such "humanitarian" grounds.

Without taking sides here in the air force - Navy controversy, it is clear that the coming of air power produced what has been a normal pattern in technological advances in other fields. This was a resistance to change which was either irrational, or as is more often the case, a rationalized resistance to change by the vested interests. Such a reaction can be expected from those in positions of power whose power has been threatened by new persons with new skills and operating new machines which suggest the need for revised theories and assumptions.

In the period which has been described, numerous boards were appointed for "impartial studies" from the Dickman Board to the Morrow Board, and the findings with a few exceptions all tended to support the position of the vested interests. An occasional congressional committee on the other hand, usually not controlled by any single vested interest, reached opposite conclusions. However, the vested interests in various ways had access to positions of power in the legislature, and thus were always able to block radical innovations in congressional legislation.

The Senate and House naval and military affairs committees, for example, while by no means always in full agreement, were nonetheless composed of men who had well-established relationships with leaders in the War and Navy Departments, both professional and civilian. Then there were the sometimes more subtle connections of prior active affiliation with the Army or Navy by Congressmen, or the sometimes less subtle connections arising out of the existence of shipyards or naval stations, or Army posts, within the districts or states of the Senators or Representatives. Other subtle connections undoubtedly existed, giving special access to the areas of decision-making in Congress to the more well-established arms and services. This same general situation might have worked in some cases in favor of the air radicals, but as a youthful arm, little time passed in which such interests could have become firmly "vested."

Reactions of the vested interests have been well illustrated in more recent days by James Forrestal's observation in his diary that there were "these fundamental psychoses, both revolving around the use of air power:

"(1) The Navy belief, very firmly held and deeply rooted, that the Air Force wants to get control of all aviation;

(2) The corresponding psychosis of the Air Force [by this time a vested interest] that the Navy is trying to encroach upon the strategic air prerogatives of the Air Force."⁹

Those operating to preserve the status quo and the power of the vested interests, in the setting which has been described, were obviously working with a greater advantage in the legislative process than the innovators or the radicals. For they were working not only from the

9. Conversation with General Hoyt Vandenberg, July 28, 1948. The Forrestal Diaries, (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 466.

strength of presidential support and the temper of the times, but also from the relatively stronger position resulting from well-established relationships within and outside of Congress. Further, there was the residual advantage offered in many aspects of the legislative process to those seeking to prevent or delay legislation.¹⁰ The Army and Navy, for example, had well-established relationships within Congress ranging from the more obvious connections of individual legislators with shipyards and Army posts in their own districts to the more subtle loyalties such as previous military service or "sons-in-law in the Navy."

Technological Change

It is likely that most of the "contestants" in positions of authority had "passed the age of flexibility," since the time it took to reach the positions of authority, especially in the military services, was considerable. And in the Army and Navy hierarchies, as higher rank was attained, flexibility and adaptability to new weapons and fundamentally revised doctrines, was likely to have decreased. Bernard Brodie has suggested, for example, that in military systems infallibility is attained at approximately the fourth star.¹¹ This tendency toward inflexibility is likely to have been a reason for the time lag between the recognition and acceptance of aviation and the construction of new doctrines and techniques of war.¹² Aircraft was a new technic with advantages of surpassing land and sea barriers and possessing other

10. See David Truman, The Governmental Process, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 353.

11. See his "Strategy As A Science," loc. cit., note 6, p. 473.

12. See Eliot D. Chapple and Carlton S. Coon, "Technological Change and Cultural Integration," in Conflicts of Power in Modern Culture, ed. by Lyman Bryson, Lewis Finkelstein, and R.M. MacIver, 7th Symposium, Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), pp. 258-266.

general potentialities as a military weapon. But those in authority in the Army were well accustomed to doctrines and techniques constructed for the use of the Cavalry, Infantry and Artillery just as in the Navy the leaders regarded the battleship as the capital weapon of the sea. A whole new pattern of thought was suggested by the air radicals in order to accommodate the new aerial medium of warfare, but many of those in authority were incapable of adaptation and fought the new technic tooth and nail. What happened in the legislative process in the passage of the Air Corps Act was the adoption of legislation engendered by the Morrow Board, a presidentially-appointed composite group, and modified in the committees of Congress through compromises among the major contestants.

The Legislative Decisions

The basic decisions on national military aviation policy were made, as suggested, in the deliberations of the Morrow Board in the fall of 1925. The Morrow Board was neither an "executive" nor "legislative" group, and thus from the beginning the source of the legislation promised to be composite.

Traditionally Congress has concerned itself with the regulation of the multifarious details of the military establishment,¹³ and the Air Corps Act proved no exception to this pattern. Yet even so, the committees of Congress which are nominally the decision-making units, do little more in the last analysis than accept or reject the advice of experts on complex, technical military matters.

In the case of the Air Corps Act, the advice on military aviation was conflicting and contradictory, thereby increasing the

13. See Howard White, Executive Influence in Determining Military Policy in the United States, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1924).

decision-making task of the legislators. This was met, in the present case, by heavy dependence upon the advice of a presidentially-appointed board, composed of representatives of the Army-Navy "bloc," the Congress, and industry.

The chief actors, or contestants, in the legislative process under analysis were the various groups, or their agents, who were vying for power in the national defense structure. These included the air radicals, led by Mitchell; the Army and Navy, whose leaders were usually united on the issues under study; the Air Service "gradualists" personified by Patrick; the President of the United States, as commander in chief of the Army and Navy and leader of the Republican Party and the administration; and the House and Senate Military Committees, which were, in fact, composite groups containing agents of the other groups and members with multiple-interests, loyalties and allegiances.

The air radicals were the revolutionaries, desiring root changes in the national defense system, changes which would inevitably increase their power, prestige and privileges. They were inspired by the technological development of aircraft, in which they saw almost unlimited potentialities as a transportation medium, and thus adaptable to both war and peace. Being for the most part younger officers who had shown some daring in joining this new branch of the military service, they had not become inculcated with the hierarchical principles of the established organization. They were not so loyal to the set principles of military discipline and organization. Mitchell, for one, became convinced that the institutional national defense system, as then constructed, served as a barrier to the realization of his goals. He was, in this sense, to borrow one of Robert Merton's terms, a "rebellionist."¹⁴

14. For Robert K. Merton's typology of modes of individual adaptation in social systems, see his Social Theory and Social Structure, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 133 ff.

Attempts by Army authorities to co-opt Mitchell, if such attempts were made, proved unsuccessful. In Mitchell's words, he "could have been a Major General and Chief of the Air Service, had I so desired, by subscribing to the fallacious doctrines of the War Department and becoming a 'yes' man to the system." Mitchell claimed that even after his court martial, had he expressed a willingness to conform, the rebuke given him by the War Department "would have been withdrawn within six months, . . . and I would have been put back at the head of the Air Service." And Mitchell observed further,

You must understand that the General Staff is not competent to judge about the whole question of National Defense. In our Regular Army, after the officers have been in fifteen or twenty years, they are apt to pay more attention to holding their jobs than to other things. 15

Whether Mitchell's observations in this matter were fanciful or accurate, they do suggest what might have been his basic motivations. He felt that rebellion was the only course open by which he might achieve his aims in the face of the established military system. Mitchell clearly saw his role as that of a rebel, fighting against the vested interests. He sought and found support not only within his own organization, members of which among other things saw in success more rank, pay and privileges for themselves, but also within Congress and among the public. Members of the House Military Committee who supported Mitchell, a majority but not all of whom were Democrats, were operating from complex personal motivations which it is not possible to develop here. But many of those who supported Mitchell, both Republicans and Democrats, were subjected also to cross-pressures and conflicting loyalties and allegiances in some cases, and thus

15. Mitchell to The Editor, Omaha Bee, Omaha, Nebraska (March 18, 1926), copy in Mitchell Papers.

Mitchell's strength in the committee and in Congress as a whole was not sufficient for him to achieve his goals.

Another group, more vaguely defined than the air radicals, and more phantomlike, were the "air gradualists," whose position may be exemplified by General Patrick. Patrick, formerly a Cavalry officer who had learned to fly at the age of fifty-nine and who had been placed in charge of the Air Service partly in order to insure Army discipline within that organization, had become in effect a supporter of Mitchell and many of Mitchell's advanced air power theories. Yet he was not a radical and from the viewpoint of the air radicals was frequently all too ready to compromise in the face of the realities of the situation. Patrick's support in the legislative struggle became strong in the House Military Committee, which, acting as referee among the various contending groups, saw in Patrick's compromising attitude the best and perhaps only solution possible to the air service controversy in the spring of 1926. Most experienced Congressmen were well aware of the necessity of compromise in the legislative process and were inclined to eventual membership in the gradualists' group if they were at all inclined toward development of air power.

The President, another contestant in the legislative struggle over air power, as commander in chief of the Army and Navy, as head of the government administration and the Republican Party with healthy majorities in the House and Senate, occupied a position of more potential power than any other of the major actors in the decision-making. As commander in chief his power was somewhat diffused by his dependence upon his Secretaries of War and Navy for information, and these officers were in turn, and admittedly, highly dependent upon the professional military and naval officers for information and advice. At the top of an organizational hierarchy, Coolidge was responsible for the sometimes difficult coordination of conflicting goals arising out of his multiple positions and responsibilities.

As commander in chief he was responsible for the national defense of the United States, and thus he was eager to command an "adequate" military organization. At the same time he was also interested in economy in government and reduction of taxes, which would not have been possible under a system of competition in heavy armaments. Thus he was intent upon the furtherance of international agreements for armaments limitation. Some of the theories being advanced by the air radicals may have appealed to Coolidge in that they offered national defense at bargain prices, through the elimination of heavy naval establishments; but since Coolidge was dependent upon the General Staff and General Board for the "best" professional advice, he could not be convinced of the validity of the claims of the air radicals. He was a conservative, a conformist, and a cautious man, and it would not have been in keeping with his character to accept the ideas, mainly untried, of the air radicals. He was inclined toward the preservation of existing institutions and the status quo, and regarded Mitchell and the group supporting him as dangerous agitators who threatened "civilian control" of military policy.

Neither the inclination of the President nor the temper of the times produced in the office of the Presidency strong and assertive leadership in relationships with the Congress. But there was, in the committees on military affairs, usually a residual of presidential influence, and in the case of this aviation legislation it was enough to allow the President's desires to win out to a very great extent. Having let it be known that he favored the findings of the Morrow Board regarding military aviation, and no more, the spirit of the times plus Republican strength in Congress enabled the President's desires to win out.

The President also had control over the Bureau of the Budget, a powerful weapon particularly in a period during which there was little or no popular pressure for the maintenance of large military forces. Though his personal leadership was not boldly exerted, Coolidge held very great power in determining the course of military policy formulation.

The Army and Navy establishments can be listed as another group whose agents were chief actors in the decision-making. Although entirely separate organizations in structure and bitterly hostile to each other on many issues, the Army and Navy had a common vested interest in the prevention of the fundamental changes demanded by the air radicals. They were unalterably opposed to the establishment of a Department of Defense or a separate air service which would rob them of their control over aviation units. Through their control of technical information and the channels of communication, they heavily influenced the civilian Secretaries of War and the Navy. In this alliance was a powerful force not only per se, but by way of the inter-relationships which existed throughout the decision-making system, particularly in the military committees of the Congress.

As indicated in an earlier chapter, the Senate Military Committee was, in general, in 1925 and 1926, supporting the stand of the vested interests, and its role was one of holding the line against any radical change in the national defense system. What opposition there was in the Senate committee was most obvious in the junior minority member, Senator Joseph T. Robinson. Another Democratic member of the committee, at the time, was Senator Walter F. George, who has written that he was "engaged at the time with other important work" and implicitly suggests he was not interested in the aviation legislation.¹⁶

16. Letter from Senator George to writer, March 19, 1953.

The House committee, however, was a more composite group of representatives of the various contestants described above. Support was strong in this committee, for example, for the establishment of a Department of National Defense. An analysis of the committee vote, by 11 to 10 rejecting a favorable report on a bill calling for a defense department, reveals two factors which apparently influenced the stand taken by the members. These factors were political party affiliation and previous military experience. Of the eight Democrats on the committee, six voted for the establishment of a Department of Defense. Four of the thirteen Republican members of the committee also voted yes. All of the four Republicans had seen military service and two were former Air Service pilots. Indicated in this vote is a decided tendency toward a party split on the issue, thus substantiating the proposition regarding the residual support attendant to an administration-supported measure. It is also significant that of the Republicans who voted favorably to the views of the air radicals, two were former pilots and all four had seen some type of military service. While the most important factor in the committee vote seems to have been party affiliation and military service, there were the "normal" deflections often expected in the American party system.

The House committee was nonetheless the source of strongest support of air power development, although the air radicals were unable to muster enough support for a favorable report of a Department of Defense or Separate Air Service bill. It is obvious, however, that even if such a bill had been favorably reported from the House committee, its passage in the full House, and more especially in the Senate, was highly doubtful. As has been indicated, it became clear to air power enthusiasts that the best that could be had in the 69th session of Congress was a compromise bill, and supporters of the air

development advocates worked for the inclusion of as many of the air service recommendations as possible in the bill.

External Pressures on the Contestants

Whatever external pressures there were on the actors probably inclined them to favor the preservation of the status quo in national defense organization. There was initially widespread press support for Mitchell, and his activities were such as to encourage newspaper attention to them. The news coverage of the naval disasters of the fall of 1925, and their concurrent publicity of Mitchell as a colorful and dynamic personality brought the air issue to the fore in national attention.

While it might have been expected that the aircraft manufacturers would have formed a strong pressure group in support of Mitchell's ideas, this did not turn out to be the case in 1925 and 1926. It is likely that they were more inclined to depend upon the certain contracts of the Army and Navy than be willing to risk a drastic change in organization and set-up. The aircraft manufacturers had already established their contractual relationships with authorities within the Army and Navy establishments and it is likely that although they were interested in expanding aircraft use, nonetheless they seemed to prefer the certainty of the status quo.

The strongest pressures operating on the actors came from the general situation of the 'twenties - the spirit and temper of the times. In an era of anti-internationalism, pacifism, and the appeal for further disarmament, little urgency was seen in the need for having an up-to-date and modern national defense establishment. This national lethargy allowed the Army and Navy vested interests to maintain their hold on

the status quo and enabled them to effectively block any efforts at radical change in the national defense organization and doctrines. Lack of urgency for attention to national defense in a geographically isolated nation produced a setting in which basic change of the established system was made extremely difficult.

Information

The strongest forces in the legislative consideration of military aviation legislation in 1926 were working to have the recommendations of the Morrow Board embodied into national legislation. These recommendations called for no fundamental change in defense organization and doctrines, but proposed a number of measures to alleviate the "minor grievances" of the personnel in the Air Service.

In reaching its conclusions, the Morrow Board, according to its own report, was faced with the problem of conflicting testimony, not only as to opinion but also as to what were the facts. The board received conflicting information, for example, as to the relative standing of the United States with other nations in regard to air power. Indeed, the board had received conflicting information as to the number of serviceable planes the Army Air Service then possessed.

In effect, the findings of the board were based upon their own definitions of national defense needs, and their own inclination to believe this or that particular witness and the information presented by the various witnesses. In its findings, it was made clear that the Morrow Board had accepted for the most part the testimony of the leaders of the Army and Navy, and had rejected that of Mitchell and other air radicals. As suggested earlier, indications are that the Morrow Board set out to prove the "falsity" of the claims of the air radicals.

America's aircraft effort in the war was still in dispute at this time. There were the findings of the Dickman Board, the report of the Chief of the Air Service of the AEF, and various other reports and memoirs. But there was nothing in the way of an authoritative, complete history of the aeronautical effort of the United States during the war. Again, for the Morrow Board and later for the House committee, it was a question of which witness members of the committee chose to believe.

In the legislative and other information seeking proceedings, the issue had been raised also as to whether it was possible for the decision-makers to obtain anything other than the institutionalized opinion of the vested interest groups. Whether junior officers would challenge the orthodoxy of their institutions (whether Army or Navy, or perhaps in Congress, the Party leadership), was a question that was never fully answered. But it was clear that the feeling that "It's a long way to Guam" prevailed in the military hierarchies. Thus, younger officers, eager for promotion and "good reports" were hesitant to challenge the established doctrines even though they may have been familiar with new concepts and machines of war and may have been able to contribute much to the progressive modernization of the national defense structures.

Summary of Conclusions

In summary, the Air Corps Act of 1926 was a culmination of the post-war aviation controversy, but the act was not in fact "made" by the Congress or its committees alone. To the contrary, it was principally the product of a presidentially-appointed board, which was a composite group of representatives or agents of the contesting parties in a

struggle for power. The Morrow Board was not actually fully representative in its composition, but rather was so constituted as to heavily favor the vested interests.

The Morrow Board had no legally defined authority, yet with its aura of competence it had more real power in the decision-making process than the committees of Congress which possessed the largest portion of structural authority for determining military policies under the American system of government. The establishment of the Morrow Board was an outgrowth of other factors in the setting, particularly the personality and activities of one of the main contestants in the struggle and the principal catalyst in the process, "Billy" Mitchell.

Another significant factor was an unpredictable variable which may be called "chance." Had not the Shenandoah disaster, and the mishap involving an experimental naval flight from San Francisco to Hawaii occurred, both of which were front-page headline stories, then Mitchell would not have had the opportunity for exploiting the situation in the manner he used. These disasters were at least open to the interpretation that reflected unfavorably upon the Navy's administration of aviation matters, and Mitchell had made the most of this, indirectly forcing the President to appoint the Morrow Board. The evidence indicates that Coolidge had such an investigation at least in the back of his mind at the time of the naval mishaps and Mitchell's charges. But it is clear that Mitchell's accusations had prodded the President to speedy action.

America's geographical isolation was a concrete reality, and the limited range and bomb capacity of existing aircraft in 1926 were also a reality. Mitchell's claims for aircraft were, indeed, to a certain extent prophetic, but at the time many of them were obviously

exaggerated. Mitchell, as a radical, was ahead of his times not only in terms of the views of the vested interests but also in terms of the existing capabilities of the airplane. Thus a nation with a defensive mind could muster little enthusiasm about the possibility of an enemy attack by aircraft. Besides, who were the enemies?

Although Mitchell did not achieve his aims at the time (it was not until the National Security Act of 1947 that Mitchell's desired "independence" for the Air Force was fulfilled), he was largely responsible for setting in motion the process that resulted not only in the Air Corps Act, but also in the Air Commerce Act and a Naval Aviation Act, all stressing the development of civilian and military aviation.

Mitchell's agitation was also largely responsible for the recognition in the Air Corps Act, by the fact of changing the name of the Air Service to the Air Corps, of the doctrine of a separate mission for the air force. This was the organizational nucleus of strategic bombing missions which were later to become one of the primary functions of United States air power.

It is possible that the air radicals would not have obtained even the few concessions that were finally granted had not the Morrow Board been created. The Morrow Board gave some impetus to the development of aviation and partial acceptance of some of the Mitchell doctrines, such as the existence of a separate mission, which might not have been forthcoming from a Congress left to depend entirely upon the War and Navy Departments for information and advice.

While the Congress, through its committees, was not the creator of this legislation, it was the "ratifier" of plans emanating from other sources, or the "broker" between competing interests both within and outside the legislative institution. Nonetheless, in arriving at a

decision on the final form of the legislation, Congress was able to make significant adjustments in that form which were, in a sense, creative. For example, it was the House Military Committee that insisted upon statutory provision for Air Corps representation on the General Staff; it was the committee that insisted upon a strict definition of an aviation pilot; it was the same committee that insisted upon and obtained legislation to aid the Air Corps in the maintenance of competent air mechanics; and it was the House committee that insisted that the five-year development program begin at once instead of being postponed a year. These changes in existing policy were not fundamental, but they constituted the major congressional contribution to the legislation, and signified the assertion of congressional prerogative in challenging the policy of the vested interests.

The information available to the decision-makers was conflicting and often contradictory, not only as to opinion but as to fact. But the most "authoritative" information available was that America's aviation was progressing adequately, and that the military organization and doctrines were the "correct" ones for the existing situation. Those seeking basic change, the radicals, were looked upon generally as individuals with special "class interests" seeking personal gain in the proposed change. But it is clear that the motivating factors for all groups were generally the same, but with varying orientation. In this situation where there was much conflicting information being offered to Congressional decision-makers, the power and prestige of the Morrow Board was increased. Members of congressional committees, many of them finding themselves in a quandary as to which course of action to approve, found it convenient to rely upon the findings of a board which seemed to have the competence, prestige, and popular and

presidential support. This amounted to the existence of real power in the Morrow Board in its role in the determination of aviation policy. Thus one finds the locus of power in an extra-legal, and in a sense, irresponsible, group. The source of its power was widespread support by the various groups which collectively were powerful forces in the shaping of policies.

The final decisions on the major details of H.R. 10827 which was to become the Air Corps Act, were made in executive session, in which the acting chairman of the committee, Representative W. Frank James, brought together the Chief of the Air Service, General Patrick, and the Secretary of War, who, realizing the necessity of a compromise if any legislation at all was to be forthcoming, were able to agree on a bill. This bill was more of a compromise on the part of the air enthusiasts than of the War Department, but the locus of power in the situation was recognized by both the Chief of the Air Service and those members of the House committee who were friendly to the aspirations of the air enthusiasts.

In the whole process there was little discussion or debate of over-all national defense strategy in any stage of the legislative process other than the statements of official War and Navy Department policy in hearings and investigations. The process was taken up, instead, with questions of rank, pay, promotion and other details of the administration of the Army aviation service. Also, there was no record vote at any stage of the legislative process by which the contemporary public, or post-factum analysts, could attempt to assess the responsibility for the policies adopted.

The President's control over the national budget, in addition to his veto power, gave him an inherent control over the entire development of military policy in a time in which there was little

enthusiasm for military expenditures, or no obvious urgency for military preparedness. The five-year development program provided for in the Air Corps Act was framed within the limitations set by the President's program of national economy. Congress could have authorized and appropriated for a larger program, but the political realities of the time made this virtually impossible.

The implementation of the program for aviation development still remained to be determined, for the Air Corps Act was passed in the closing days of the first session of the 69th Congress. But such appropriations were the province of a totally different area of the Congress, its appropriations committees, and the actual implementation of the program was also largely dependent upon executive willingness to seek a deficiency appropriation in the next session. But this was to be another story, beyond the limits set for this study. Suffice it to say that the determination of actual military strength was within the power of other groups in the structure of Congress, who shaped whatever power was held by the groups which "authorized" military aviation policies.

As the technical complexity of warfare, the needs of national security and attendant secrecy increase, so does the control of legislators tend to decrease over national military policy. In 1926 the issues involved scores of millions of dollars and relatively comprehensible machinery. Today the issues involve scores of billions of dollars and vastly more complex machinery. Legislative control over military policy depends to a great extent upon access to information, and the ability to pass judgment on the information received or lacking. The Congress must be adequately equipped to perform its role as referee among competing vested interest groups in the formulation of national defense policies.

But it must be realized, as this study has illustrated, that Congress itself is not a "separate co-ordinate" or isolated group functioning within a strictly defined system of constitutional separation of powers. It is a complex and composite group with a multiplicity of roles and representing a myriad of interrelated, and sometimes conflicting vested interests. Whether or not Congress is a truly representative body, which representational characteristics would comprise power, depends largely upon the degree of interest in any issue on the part of the represented groups of contemporary society, and the organizational capacity of the Congress and the American political party system to deal justly with the various and often competing elements of American society.

SUBJECT	MORROW BOARD REPORT* RECOMMENDATIONS	LAMPERT COMMITTEE REPORT*	H.R. 7916* - WAR DEPARTMENT BILL - (MORIN)	S 3321 - WAR DEPARTMENT BILL* (WADSWORTH)
Authorized Air Corps Strength	Two additional brigadier- generals; (no other details).	A "greater number" of men should be trained as aviators.	No proposal other than two additional brigadier-generals.	Two additional brigadier- generals; same total number of officers as in the National Defense Act of 1920.
Flying Requirements for Officers	Only experienced flying men should be in immediate command of flying activities.	No proposal.	Only 10% of officers in the Air Corps may be non-flyers.	Only 10% of the officers in the Air Corps may be non- flyers.
Additional Assistant Secretary of War	Shall perform duties with reference to aviation as assigned by the Secretary of War.	No proposal.	Shall perform such duties as the Secretary of War directs.	To "have charge . . . of Army aviation," this duty should be specified by statute. (Committee amendment)
Air Corps Representation on the General Staff	Secretary of War should create <u>administratively</u> , air sections in the five divisions of the General Staff.	Air Service should be "adequately represented" on the General Staff.	No statutory provision as per Morrow Report.	No statutory provision as per the Morrow Board Report.
Five-Year Development Program: Men and Materiel	A "plan" not to exceed five years; "special appropriations" worthy of consideration; further study; no specific details.	Large sums should be spent annually for procurement of new aircraft, constructed by civilian industry with orders based on a "continuing program"	Not included.	Not included.
Procurement of Military Aircraft	A policy of continuity of orders on "standard" models; competitive bidding should be "modified".	One single government agency be given sole charge of pro- curement of aircraft; no requirement of lowest bidder.	Competitive bidding may be eliminated in procurement, etc., follows Morrow recommendations.	Follows Morrow recommendations but adds provision for compen- sation to inventors for unpatentable designs.
Air Mechanics - Extra Rank and Pay	No proposal.	Additional compensation to secure adequate number of competent mechanics be pro- vided.	Not included.	Not included.
Temporary Rank for Air Officers	Temporary rank for officers assigned to, but not to ex- ceed, 12 air stations, when other suitable officers with permanent rank are unavailable.	Calls for elimination of "injustices to air service officers".	Temporary rank may be awarded not to exceed one grade higher than permanent rank.	Temporary rank may be awarded not to exceed two grades above permanent rank, (Committee amendment)
Appointment of Chief of the Air Corps	No proposal.	No proposal.	No proposal.	No proposal.
Implementation of the Five-Year Program	No details.	Not less than \$10,000,000 should be spent per year by both War and Navy Departments in procurement of new flying equipment.	Not included.	Not included.
	* Approved and recommended to Congress, for consideration, by President Coolidge.	* Called for department of de- fense; legislative definition of Army-Navy missions; other aid to civilian aviation.	* Rejected as such by House Military Committee.	* As amended by Senate Committee.

H.R. 7916* - WAR DEPARTMENT BILL - (MORIN)	S 3321 - WAR DEPARTMENT BILL* (WADSWORTH)	H.R. 10827 - HOUSE VERSION WITH FLOOR AMENDMENTS	H.R. 10827 - SENATE VERSION WITH AMENDMENTS	CONFERENCE VERSION, AS ENACTED AND APPROVED
No proposal other than two additional brigadier-generals.	Two additional brigadier-generals; same total number of officers as in the National Defense Act of 1920.	Two additional brigadier-generals; authorized strength; 1,514 officers, 16,000 enlisted men.	Two additional brigadier-generals; 1,514 officers and 16,000 enlisted men, 90% to be flyers except non-flyers urgently needed may be retained.*	Two additional brigadier-generals; authorized strength of 1,514 officers and 16,000 enlisted men. Section 2.
Only 10% of officers in the Air Corps may be non-flyers.	Only 10% of the officers in the Air Corps may be non-flyers.	90% of officers must be flyers and a pilot is defined as one who has flown 150 hours in a plane, 75 of which were solo. (Floor amendment)	Eliminated House provision defining pilot as requiring 150 hours with 75 solo.	Two-thirds of brigadier-generals must be flyers; 90% of others must be flyers; flying units in all cases to be commanded by flyers.* Section 2.
Shall perform such duties as the Secretary of War directs.	To "have charge . . . of Army aviation," this duty should be specified by statute. (Committee amendment)	". . . shall perform such duties with reference to aviation . . . as the Secretary of War may direct."	Eliminated House version of this section and inserted the section under S 3321.	"To aid in fostering military aeronautics . . . and to perform such duties as the Secretary of War may direct"; to be appointed. Sec. 9.
No statutory provision as per Morrow Report.	No statutory provision as per the Morrow Board Report.	House feels it necessary to give legislative status to the Air Corps representation on the General Staff.	Eliminated provision by Statute for air sections on the General Staff.	Air Corps sections in each division of the General Staff for the next three years, by law. Sec. 5.
Not included.	Not included.	At the end of five years an increase of personnel to authorized strength; a total of 1,800 planes* and 10 airships. (* Reduced by amendment from 2,200)	Increase in personnel to authorized strength; 1,800 planes; eliminated provision for 10 airships as of little value and should be developed by the Navy.	Increase in personnel to authorized strength by the end of 5-year period; 1,800 planes. Sec. 8.
Competitive bidding may be eliminated in procurement, etc., follows Morrow recommendations.	Follows Morrow recommendations but adds provision for compensation to inventors for unpatentable designs.	Under study by joint subcommittee of the Military and Naval Affairs Committees.	Provision to give recognition to "reliable" aircraft manufacturers.	Elaborate section dealing with aircraft procurement details - to aid and build aircraft industry. (Written by Joint Subcommittee, was added in conference) Sec. 10.
Not included.	Not included.	Provision for 1st and 2nd class air mechanics with up to 40% additional pay, not to exceed 14% of enlisted Air Corps strength.	Eliminated this House provision allowing increased rank and pay for Air Corps mechanics.	1st and 2nd class ratings for up to 14% enlisted strength for Air mechanics who will receive pay of 2nd and 3rd class ratings. Sec. 2.
Temporary rank may be awarded not to exceed one grade higher than permanent rank.	Temporary rank may be awarded not to exceed two grades above permanent rank. (Committee amendment)	Temporary rank permissible if necessary up to one grade higher than permanent rank.	Temporary rank permissible, if necessary, up to two grades above permanent rank.	Temporary rank permitted up to two grades providing no Air officer available and with no command outside own corps with temporary rank. Sec. 3.
No proposal.	No proposal.	Appointment to be made from officers with not less than 22 years commissioned service with actual and extended service in the Air Corps.	Increase in number of officers eligible for appointment to Chief, so as to not limit presidential choice.	Appointment of Chief from officers of any grade with 15 years or more service and with "actual and extended" service within the Air Corps. Sec. 7.
Not included.	Not included.	To begin on July 1, 1926; the president shall submit to Congress annual estimates to cover cost of 5-year program. Supplemental estimate "shall" be submitted to cover cost of first annual increment.	Same as House version, but amended to begin July 1, 1927.	To be distributed over 5-year period, with not more than 1/5 of the full increment being made in the first year (beginning July 1, 1926).** Sec. 8.

* Rejected as such by House Military Committee.

* As amended by Senate Committee.

* Not effective in time of war.

* Pilot defined as having 200 hrs. peace-time flying, 75 of which were solo.
** President was authorized to request supplemental estimate for fiscal 1927 to cover cost of first annual increment.

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ABSTRACT

The use of aircraft in the first World War was a technological development of far-reaching significance. The potentialities of aviation, as seen by some in the post-war period challenged existing military organization and doctrines of warfare in the United States.

Proposals for change resulting from a belief in aviation's potential, suggested by war-time experiences, came in a period of American governmental retrenchment, anti-foreignism, international independence and nationalism. The League of Nations as an instrument of security was rejected and emphasis was placed on disarmament pacts and the search for substitutes for war other than the collective security proposals of Woodrow Wilson.

There was constant agitation in the post-war period by "air radicals" led by William Mitchell, for basic changes in American military doctrines and organization. Underlying these arguments was the insistence upon the idea of an independent mission for aviation, an idea which was developing into the doctrine of strategic warfare. The established older services - the ground forces of the Army and the Navy's surface forces - refused to accept the doctrines being propounded by air enthusiasts. Aviation was officially regarded as essentially an unstable auxiliary device to be used with the well established surface forces.

Thus developed a struggle between the old and the new - a struggle between conflicting interpretations of the "lessons of the

war" regarding aviation. The conflict soon developed into a legislative struggle. For in the Congress, under the American system of government, lies the final legal authority for determining the size, organization, and in effect the major military doctrines of the armed forces. Congressional debate on the national defense structure beginning in 1919, evolved around several basic proposals for change, namely: for a United Air Service, for an Independent Air Service, or for a Department of Defense, with the aviation service on an equal basis with the Army and Navy. Such proposals produced bitter controversies as well as a large number of Congressional, Presidential, and military investigations, studies, and reports.

Debate over national defense neared a climax in the fall of 1925, precipitated by a series of events, including the disaster involving the naval airship Shenandoah and the subsequent attack by Mitchell upon the leadership of the defense establishment; the Morrow Board investigation and report following the dramatic turn of events; and the report of a House Select Committee, which recommended the establishment of a Department of National Defense.

In the face of these incidents, which had culminated in the sensational military trial and conviction of Mitchell; the Morrow Board refutation of most of Mitchell's major contentions; and the House Select (Lampert) Committee's recommendations, the 69th Congress was pressured into a major decision on national aviation policy in its first session.

An analysis of the history, setting, and major issues engendered in this controversy and the resultant Congressional decision-making

indicates that the major incentive for Congressional decisions was provided by the Morrow Board. Although there was strong support in Congress, particularly in the House Military Committee, for the main tenets of the air radicals, the forces arrayed against basic change proved to be stronger than those advocating alterations in military doctrines and organization. The resulting legislation, the Air Corps Act of 1926, was therefore a compromise favoring the status quo. But the act gave, at the same time, some recognition to the doctrines and organizational suggestions of the air enthusiasts. The act also stimulated the development of military and commercial aviation within the existing structure.

This study has further suggested:

1. Military institutions, as vested interests, are slow to accept sometimes obvious technological advancements.
2. Congressional decision-makers are heavily dependent upon the advice of experts, but are also individually identified with the various interest groups in the legislative struggle. When experts disagreed, as they did, on the question of national security, both the dilemma and power of the Congressional decision-makers was increased.
3. In such a situation, however, a non-congressional composite group, representing various "vested interests" (although it may be questioned whether the "air radicals" were truly represented) took the initiative and, in the last analysis, was the most significant group in the determination of policy in the 1926 legislative decisions. This was the presidentially-appointed Morrow Board.
4. While the report of the Morrow Board was the major source

of the Air Corps Act of 1926, the House Military Committee positively and the Senate committee negatively, as well as the Senate-House conference committee, contributed to the final form of the act. Yet in reality Congress played a secondary role in the determination of policy.

5. A "vested interest" concept seems to be the key to the rigidity of the institutions under study, with a major role of Congress being that of "referee" or "broker." The combined strength of the Army-Navy bloc, with Presidential support, maintained the "vested interests" and sustained the status quo.

6. The power of Congress to make a final determination of military policy is conditioned by its access to information; the aura of competence and the real power held by the various contending groups, including the Congressional committees; the two-party balance of power and the amount of residual power held by the president; and the "temper of the times." The legislative process under study has shown itself to be made up of complex action and interaction by individual and social forces. The lines of authority of executive - legislative - military institutions are intertwined and no clear "separation of powers" or "civilian control of the military" existed in actuality.