

The AAF emerged from World War II on course toward recognition as a separate service.

The Founding of the Force

By Herman S. Wolk

THIS is a new day," Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold declared to the members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee. The date was October 19, 1945, and the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces (AAF) was testifying on the importance of legislating a new national security organization that would feature an independent Air Force.

General Arnold's masterful opening statement to the committee portrayed in microcosm the history and impact of airpower, culminating with the AAF's contribution to the great victory in World War II. A large part of this story was not pretty. The history of the twentieth century had found the US unprepared for successive military crises. "Each new crisis," General Arnold emphasized, "has found our armed services far from effectively, efficiently, or economically organized. With each crisis, modernization and coordination have been hammered out under war pressure at great waste of resources, . . . [and] allowed in large measure to lapse when the crisis is over."

General Arnold pointed to the predicament of the Army Air Corps in the years before World War II. As a branch of the Army, the primary func-

tions of the Air Corps were procurement of materiel and the operation of airfields under the supervision of the Army's Corps Areas. Even the General Headquarters (GHQ) Air Force, established in March 1935, reported to the Army Chief of Staff and remained as a tenant on its bases.

In 1937, Maj. Gen. Frank M. Andrews, commanding general of GHQ Air Force, described the airmen's frustration: "I don't believe any balanced plan to provide the nation with an adequate, effective Air Force . . . can be obtained, within the limitations of the War Department budget and without providing an organization individual to the needs of such an Air Force. Legislation to establish such an organization . . . will continue to appear until this turbulent and vital problem is satisfactorily solved."

Prior to the entry of the United States into World War II, this contentious issue—between the Air Corps and the War Department—tended to resolve itself under the pressure of aggression fomented by totalitarian nations. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in early 1939 directed an enormous expansion of aircraft production.

In 1947, aboard the C-54 Sacred Cow (opposite, as recently restored by the US Air Force Museum), President Truman signed into law the legislation creating the Department of Defense and an independent US Air Force.

Photo by Dan Patterson

Harry Truman

[illegible]

GENERAL ORDER NO. 8

GENERAL HOYT H VANDENBERG, 016001, USAF
BRIG GEN WILLIAM F MCKEE, 043579, USAF
BRIG GEN ROBERT B BURDETTE, 043579, USAF

GENERAL ROBERT V. YANNEY, 010601, USAF
- BRIG GEN JOHN L. JAMF, 010601, USAF
- LT COL CARLYLE B. BOKER, 011512, USAF
- BRIG GEN ROBERT A. TAYLOR, 011512, USAF
- BRIG GEN HUGH G. CULPIN, 010201, USAF
- COLONEL HUGH G. EDWARDS, 010201, USAF
- LT GEN EDWARD H. EDWARDS, 010201, USAF
- BRIG GEN ROBERT W. BURNS, 010701, USAF
- BRIG GEN JOHN L. WILSON, 010701, USAF
- BRIG GEN JOHN B. LYTON, 008101, USAF
- LT COL LAUREN FORSTADT, 010701, USAF (Resignation)
- LT COL LAUREN FORSTADT, 010701, USAF (Active)
- MAJ GEN EARLE E. KIRBY, 010502, USAF
- MAJ GEN GEORGE C. McDONALD, 010502, USAF
- MAJ GEN CARLE E. PARTRIDGE, 010502, USAF
- BRIG GEN THOMAS A. POWERS, 010502, USAF (Active)
- BRIG GEN THOMAS A. POWERS, 010502, USAF
- MAJ GEN OTTO W. WELCH, 010502, USAF
- BRIG GEN WILLIAM L. RICHARDSON, 010502, USAF
- BRIG GEN FRANCIS L. ANKNEY, 010502, USAF
- LT GEN EDWARD M. POWERS, 010519, USAF
- MAJ GEN WILLIAM K. KIRBY, 010501, USAF
- MAJ GEN LAURENCE C. CHAGKIE, 010510, USAF
- MAJ GEN LAURENCE C. CHAGKIE, 010510, USAF
- BRIG GEN FREDERICK M. HOPKINS, JR, 011001, USAF
- BRIG GEN ROBERT KAUCH, 009601, USAF
- BRIG GEN LYMAN P. WHITTEN, 010001, USAF
- LT GEN EDWIN W. RAWLINGS, 010001, USAF
- LT GEN EDWIN W. RAWLINGS, 010001, USAF
- BRIG GEN EDWARD W. CECIL, JR, 010001, USAF
- COLONEL WALTER W. MILLER, 010102, USAF
- COLONEL ROBERT S. MACHIN, 010102, USAF
- COLONEL PRESCOTT J. MILLER, 010102, USAF
- LT COL WALTER W. JONES, 010304, USAF
- MAJ GEN HENRY W. JONES, 010304, USAF
- MAJ GEN HUGH J. KERR, 010304, USAF

Approved July 26 1947
Harry W. ...
President of the ...

President of the Senate pro tempore.

General Arnold, who had succeeded the late Maj. Gen. Oscar Westover in September 1938 as Chief of the Air Corps, immediately activated his ties to the aircraft industry; the result was the start of enormous air-power mobilization for war.

The Ostrich Egg

Roosevelt's lofty, if impossible, aircraft production goal subsequently prompted Robert A. Lovett, assistant secretary of war for Air, to warn General Arnold, "It is a little bit like asking a hen to lay an ostrich egg. It is unlikely that you will get the egg, and the hen will never look the same." General Arnold replied that the goal was ambitious, but "if we can induce her to lay it, I feel that we must accept the wear and tear on the hen."

With Nazi Germany on the rampage in Europe, the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, and the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, moved "to permit Air Force autonomy in the degree needed." General Arnold, General Marshall, and Secretary Lovett agreed that the major task was to build up the Army's combat air arm. The Army Air Forces was established in June 1941 and achieved *de facto* autonomy in March 1942, when it became co-equal with the Army Ground Forces and the Services of Supply, subsequently the Army Service Forces. At the same time, General Arnold became a full-fledged member of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, representing the AAF view on all air matters.

In the midst of a global war, General Arnold, with immense foresight, created groups within AAF Headquarters to plan for a postwar independent Air Force. In early 1942, only a few months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, General Arnold created his Advisory Council to consider important issues and deal with organizational concepts relevant to a postwar Air Force.

This council, first headed by Col. Charles P. Cabell, included at various times during the war Cols. Jacob E. Smart, Fred M. Dean, Emmett O'Donnell, Jr., and Lauris G. Norstad. Colonel Smart recalled that, when he reported to General Arnold, the AAF Chief emphasized that Smart should spend 100 percent of his time "thinking" and "not doing any of the routine work of the staff."

Subsequently, General Arnold and

Colonel Smart presented to General Marshall a concept that they thought was sound. General Marshall turned it down cold. As they walked back to General Arnold's office, the General admonished Colonel Smart, "From now on, I want you to spend thirty percent of your time thinking and seventy percent on how to sell an idea." Equally important, General Arnold formed the Special Projects Office in April 1945 under Col. F. Trubee Davison (former assistant secretary of war for Air) to coordinate the AAF's postwar planning with the War Department General Staff.

Even before the war, General Arnold made it a top priority to identify and encourage officers whom he thought well suited to key command and planning positions. In July 1943, with an eye firmly on postwar planning, he brought Brig. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter back to Washington from the Mediterranean theater, appointing him as assistant chief of air staff. Plans. One year later, General Arnold tapped Brig. Gen. Lauris Norstad to return to Washington to become chief of staff of Twentieth Air Force. The AAF had encountered severe problems in the production of the B-29 bomber, and General Arnold wanted someone in whom he had confidence to take charge of its planning. General Norstad was destined to play a crucial role in crafting unification legislation and in planning for the independent Air Force.

In May 1945, with the war in Europe at an end and Japan defeated but still refusing to surrender, General Arnold ordered Kuter to the Pacific as deputy commander of the AAF in the Pacific Ocean Area, and he assigned General Norstad to the two-star post as Plans chief. General Arnold made clear to General Norstad that he should take the lead in postwar planning, making certain that the postwar organization would be compatible with independence.

During the war, Congress was also keenly interested in postwar organization. In the spring of 1944, the Woodrum Committee (named for Virginia Democratic Rep. Clifton A. Woodrum) considered the question of unity of command. This committee failed to report legislation but opened the way for creation of the JCS Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense. Headed by Adm. James O. Richardson,

the committee in April 1945 recommended the establishment of a single Department of National Defense with three co-equal services. Admiral Richardson himself cast the lone vote dissenting from the majority report. He opposed formation of a separate Air Force, fearful that the Navy would lose its air arm.

When the US dropped two atomic weapons on Japan and the war ended, General Arnold, Gen. Carl A. Spaatz (who would succeed General Arnold as Commanding General, AAF, in February 1946), Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, AAF deputy commander, and General Norstad turned their full attention to reorganization. Their goal was to make the Army Air Forces co-equal with the War Department General Staff, which would preserve the position that the AAF enjoyed in wartime and enable it to make the transition into a single department setup. General Spaatz said, "When it came time for the Air Force to assume a co-equal status with the other services, there would be need for only a minimum amount of reorganization."

Keep Your Shirts On

However, in late 1945, the War Department boards that considered reorganization rejected the AAF's view and made the Air Staff co-equal with the Army Ground Forces Staff under the War Department Staff. The AAF leaders were chagrined, but Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, a promoter of airpower independence, assured General Spaatz of his continuing strong support. Said General Eisenhower, "The Air Force boys should keep their shirts on and plan for separate airpower."

In March 1946, General Spaatz—after talks with General Eisenhower (who had replaced General Marshall as Army Chief of Staff)—created three major combat air commands: Air Defense Command, Strategic Air Command, and Tactical Air Command. Formation of Tactical Air Command fulfilled Eisenhower's desire for a tactical air element to support the ground forces.

Immediately after World War II, Generals Arnold and Eisenhower emphasized that the most important lesson of the war was the absolute necessity for unity of command. This meant the emergence in the various theaters of an autonomous air ele-

ment, commanded by an airman, co-equal with the land and naval forces, each responsible to the Supreme Allied Commander.

"Only with this co-equal status," General Arnold argued, "could the air commander authoritatively present before the Supreme Commander what he could accomplish, assume the responsibility for its accomplishment, and be free to carry out that responsibility with full appreciation of air capabilities and limitations."

During the war, coordination had been achieved through actions of various committees and boards of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, General Arnold noted that there were "too many vital and basic matters on which there had been no agreement and therefore no solution. . . . Without the pressures of war, the coordination that does exist will tend to become less complete and less effective." In short, the time had come to legislate a single Department of National Defense with three co-equal services—land, sea, and air.

General Arnold should be considered the first founder of the Air Force, but General Eisenhower must be recognized for the role he played in persuading Congress to establish an independent Air Force. General Arnold's advocacy was complemented by Eisenhower's statesmanship.

The basic argument advanced by General Eisenhower to Congress clearly carried the day. In key testimony on November 16, 1945, on the subject of unification, Eisenhower immediately departed from his prepared remarks and stressed the crucial contribution of the air forces to D-Day operations and victory in Europe. He said:

"The Normandy invasion was based on a deep-seated faith in the power of the Air Forces in overwhelming number to intervene in the land battle, *i.e.*, that the Air Forces by their action could have the effect on the ground of making it possible for a small force of land troops to invade a continent. . . . Without that Air Force, without its independent power, entirely aside from its ability to sweep the enemy air forces out of the sky, without its power to intervene in the ground battle, that invasion would have been fantastic. . . . Unless we had faith in airpower as a fighting arm to intervene and make safe that landing, it would have been more

than fantastic; it would have been criminal."

General Eisenhower had become an advocate, like General Arnold, of an independent Air Force. The Supreme Commander had worked especially well with General Spaatz in North Africa and western Europe. He admired General Spaatz's quiet competence and called him "the best operational airman in the world." General Eisenhower's respect for what modern airpower could accomplish had grown by leaps. He believed deeply in the principle of the "three-legged stool"—a national defense setup with each service mutually dependent on the others in a single Department of National Defense, fostering unity of command and also economy.

Too Expensive

Eisenhower noted that "competition is like some of the habits we have—in small amounts, they are very desirable; carried too far, they are ruinous." A unified defense establishment would buy more security for less money. After succeeding General Marshall in November 1945 as Army Chief of Staff, General Eisenhower spoke of his deep conviction to the War Department General Staff:

"The Air Commander and his staff are an organization coordinate with and co-equal to the land forces and the Navy. I realize that there can be other individual opinions, . . . but that seems to me to be so logical from all of our experiences in this war—such an inescapable conclusion—that I, for one, can't even entertain any longer any doubt as to its wisdom."

The General added, "no sane officer of any arm could contest this thinking that the air forces have long ago grown up, and, if anything was needed to show their equal status with all others, we certainly have proved it in Europe, and from all I hear they have certainly proved it in Japan."

Additional support for a separate Air Force came from President Harry S. Truman. Having succeeded President Roosevelt in April 1945, Truman had long maintained a close interest in the military, which had been heightened during the war by his Senate committee's oversight of military procurement and its documentation

of fraud and waste in the defense industry.

Like General Eisenhower, President Truman was convinced that the defense organization needed to be changed. "One of the strongest convictions . . . I brought to the Presidency," he once said, "was that the antiquated defense setup . . . had to be reorganized quickly as a step toward ensuring our future safety and preserving world peace." The Pearl Harbor disaster, he said, had been "as much the result of the inadequate military system, which provided for no unified command, either in the field or in Washington, as it was any personal failure of Army or Navy commanders."

President Truman recognized the need for a unified command. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff," he said, "are not a unified command." Although during the war there had been cooperation among the services, this would be much more difficult during peacetime when funds became scarce. In many respects an economic conservative, President Truman could no longer abide the services engaging in fierce competition for funds.

President Truman advocated "parity" for airpower, based on the lessons of the war. He said:

"Airpower has been developed to a point where its responsibilities are equal to those of land- and seapower, and its contribution to our strategic planning is as great. In operation, airpower receives its separate assignment in the execution of the overall plan."

In December 1945, President Truman recommended to Congress a single Department of National Defense, headed by a civilian and complemented by an Office of the Chief of Staff of the military. The President's plan was greatly influenced by the existence of the atomic bomb, whose enormous destructive power ended the Pacific war.

With President Truman now clearly behind defense reorganization, General Norstad was ready to play a major role in unification legislation and the promulgation in December 1946 of a unified command plan. In General Arnold, General Norstad had watched a believer in action, with determination to drive things through, no matter what the cost. General Eisenhower's influence on General Norstad was different. The Supreme

The Army Air Corps, 1926-47

Organizational changes in the US Army's air arm prior to and during World War II resulted in some persistent confusion. The key question revolved around the status of the Air Corps.

With establishment of the Army Air Forces on June 20, 1941, the Air Corps became subordinate to the AAF. On March 9, 1942, when the AAF became co-equal with the Army Ground Forces and the Services of Supply (subsequently the Army Service Forces), the Air Corps then continued to exist only as a combat arm of the Army, like the cavalry or infantry.

During the war, personnel continued to be assigned to the Air Corps. Thus, during World War II, documents with the letterhead, "Headquarters Army Air Forces, Washington, D. C.," showed a signature block of "Joseph Smith, Colonel, Air Corps." Congress created the Air Corps on July 2, 1926, and it was abolished with the National Security Act of 1947, establishing the United States Air Force on September 18, 1947.

During World War II, the Army's twenty-eight corps were autonomous. Officers were commissioned into the corps of their specialty. Personnel spent entire careers in a single corps, and officers owed as much loyalty to the corps as to the Army as a whole. The corps had great freedom, and as a result, empire-building was rampant.

Consequently, when USAF was established in September 1947, the Air Force leadership decided not to create a corps system. Most USAF officers were assigned to the Officers of the Line of the Air Force, where they competed on the same promotion list. Exceptions were chaplains, medical personnel, and lawyers. Each of these specialties resided outside the Line of the Air Force, each with its own promotion list. Within the Line of the Air Force, specialization was accomplished by career fields. Unlike the Army's corps system, officers of the Air Force were commissioned into the Air Force and owed their loyalty to the Air Force.

Allied Commander in Europe exhibited the power of reason, the importance of optimism, and the determination not to be derailed by details.

Just before General Arnold's retirement in February 1946, General Norstad held conversations with General Arnold, General Spaatz, and Stuart Symington, assistant secretary of war for Air. All agreed that a future conflict might well start in the air. An independent Air Force should be devoted exclusively to building the world's best Air Force. This meant controlling its own promotion list and presenting its own budget to Congress.

Navy Wariness

In early 1946, General Norstad and Vice Adm. Arthur W. Radford worked closely as advisors to the Senate Military Affairs subcommittee drafting unification legislation. This subcommittee reported a bill in April 1946 that included features of the War Department's Collins plan, the Navy's Eberstadt Report, and General Norstad's own work. The bill called for a single Department of Common Defense, three co-equal services, and a Chief of Staff of Common Defense as military advisor to the President. The Navy however, continued to oppose this legislation.

Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal and the uniformed naval leaders remained wary of establishing an Office of the Secretary of Common Defense as well as an independent Air Force.

However, President Truman wanted action. He ordered Secretary Forrestal and Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson to resolve their differences over the legislation by the end of May 1946, noting that he had decided not to propose a military Chief of Staff of the Defense Department. General Norstad and Symington went to work and were careful to keep Patterson informed.

General Norstad enjoyed a fine working relationship with Symington, who said, "I have put my heart and my lungs in your hands." General Norstad and Symington met with Forrestal and Admiral Radford and during May reached agreement on eight points. However, they failed to resolve the difficult questions of a single department, a separate Air Force, the future of land-based aviation, and the status of the Marine Corps.

President Truman reacted by meeting with Patterson, Forrestal, Norstad, and Radford, stressing that a Department of National Defense should be created, headed by a civilian. Each military department would be admin-

istered by a civilian secretariat. The Navy would be able to keep the Marine Corps, Truman said, and also aircraft essential for naval operations. The services, the President told Patterson and Forrestal, "should perform their separate functions under the unifying direction, authority, and control of the Secretary of National Defense. The internal administration of the three services should be preserved in order that the high morale and *esprit de corps* of each service can be retained."

Forrestal then implemented an important change in the unification negotiations by replacing Admiral Radford with Vice Adm. Forrest Sherman. Even within the Navy, Radford had been considered a "hard-liner." Forrestal and Adm. Chester Nimitz, the Chief of Naval Operations, concluded that Admiral Sherman could negotiate more effectively, and it was now clear that President Truman would not tolerate any stalling. Admiral Sherman was not opposed to a separate Air Force and was considered more moderate than Admiral Radford, who subsequently noted that Admiral Sherman and General Norstad had "removed the impasse between the services."

Ike's Signal

The JCS in July 1946 formally charged General Norstad (now director of Plans and Operations for the War Department General Staff) and Admiral Sherman with writing a draft unification plan that could be supported by both the Army and Navy. As head of Plans and Operations, General Norstad held a position that more than a decade earlier had been filled by Brig. Gen. Frank M. Andrews, the first airman to hold the post. Eisenhower had specifically requested General Norstad, indicating his confidence in the airman and simultaneously signaling the War Department as to where he stood on unification.

General Eisenhower and AAF leaders desired unity of command based on functions, whereas the Navy wanted to establish commands according to geographic areas. General Norstad and Admiral Sherman wanted to create a system of unified commands in which every theater would have a commander responsible to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Every unified commander would have a joint staff with

three service commanders under him. Each theater commander would control land, sea, and air operations in a specific area. The problem in the Pacific (which had made for a sometimes sticky situation during the war) was solved by forming two commands—Far East Command and Pacific Command. Seven unified commands were created under the Outline Command Plan, approved by the JCS and signed by President Truman in December 1946.

Following approval of the plan, General Norstad and Admiral Sherman worked closely with the Senate Military Affairs Committee, which provided for a Secretary of National Defense and Army, Navy, and Air Force departments, each headed by a civilian.

Roles and missions would be defined by executive order, to be issued concurrently with Truman's approval of the legislation. General Norstad and Admiral Sherman agreed that they would always appear together before the committee. "We agreed," General Norstad said, "that if one of us was called, one would notify the other and would also suggest to the committee that they call the other member. Admiral Sherman and I were invited every time. It was clear that there were differences between us, but they never really split us on the principles. We never wasted time re-arguing differences between the services."

In late February 1947, President Truman sent Congress a draft of the National Security Act of 1947, calling for a Secretary of National Defense to head a National Military Establishment consisting of departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Marine Corps would remain part of the Navy Department, and naval aviation would handle naval reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and protection of shipping.

Hearings were held in the House and Senate, and in early June the Senate Committee on Armed Ser-

vices approved the bill. A conference committee crafted final legislation, and on July 26, 1947, President Truman approved the National Security Act of 1947, establishing the Office of the Secretary of National Defense and co-equal services—including a United States Air Force.

Flexibility

The National Security Act allowed the Air Force flexibility in organizing its headquarters and field structure. Like the Army and Navy, the Air Force would be constituted as an executive department. The Department of the Air Force would be headed by the Secretary of the Air Force, a civilian appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The US Air Force was established under the Department of the Air Force. The USAF Chief of Staff would be appointed by the President for a four-year term. All officers, warrant officers, and enlisted men of the Army Air Forces would be transferred to the US Air Force.

President Truman's first choice to be Secretary of National Defense was the esteemed Robert P. Patterson, Secretary of War, but he turned the post down, saying that his finances dictated that he leave government service. President Truman then chose James Forrestal, who might have been expected to influence those naval officers who all along had opposed unification and the formation of an independent Air Force.

Stuart Symington, assistant secretary of war for Air, who had spearheaded the unification drive in Congress, was named by President Truman as the first Secretary of the Air Force. General Spaatz became the first Air Force Chief of Staff.

Thus, the creation of the Air Force in 1947 marked the culmination of a long journey. However, as Secretary Symington noted, it was also only the first chapter in a longer story. Much remained to be done, and many chal-

lenges would have to be confronted. Although service roles and missions had been detailed by President Truman via executive order, a long struggle over functions was inevitable. As Mr. Symington observed, the Secretary of National Defense had been dealt a weak hand, and this office would have to be strengthened, as indeed it would be in 1949. In the year preceding the 1949 amendments to the National Security Act, Defense Secretary Forrestal had been unable to resolve roles-and-missions conflicts among the services. In deep mental distress, he resigned in March 1949 and subsequently took his own life.

The Air Force has often been described as the most technologically advanced of the military services. This was as true in 1947 as it is in 1996. Underlying the technology, however, and the doctrine, plans, and organizations, were the people who shaped the vision and the optimism over long decades, culminating in a United States Air Force. These were courageous pioneers, and their images remain vivid in our minds: flying crude machines in rough weather, putting their lives on the line; accomplishing record long-distance flights and breaking speed records in the 1920s and 1930s; expressing unpopular ideas, putting their careers in jeopardy; and building global air forces in World War II that defeated totalitarianism.

The airmen who led the Army Air Forces in a war that spanned the globe were the same visionaries who formed the Air Force before giving way to a new generation. Their perspective remains relevant. "We believe," General Eaker said in June 1947, "that the Air Force stands at the threshold of a new era. Whereas in the past it has been largely a corps of flying men, in the future . . . it will be more nearly a corps of technicians and scientists."

Perhaps no airman possessed as brilliant and farsighted a vision as General Arnold. The aircraft of today, he said in 1945, are "the museum pieces of tomorrow." To General Arnold, "an air force is always verging on obsolescence. Present equipment is but a step in progress, and any air force that does not keep its doctrines ahead of its equipment, and its vision far into the future, can only delude the nation into a false sense of security." ■

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