

83

THE ARMY INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Course 1934-1935

ORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR

by

Lt. Colonel Earl McFarland, O.D.,  
Executive, O.A.S.W.

November 21, 1934.

24

COLONEL JORDAN'S REMARKS INTRODUCING

LIEUT. COL. EARL McFARLAND

It gives me a peculiar pleasure to introduce the speaker this morning because he is a member of my Corps, the Ordnance Department, and a friend of long standing. Among the outstanding pieces of work he has done I feel that I should invite your attention to the fact that he organized a Machine Gun Section of the Carriage Division, Office, Chief of Ordnance at the outbreak of the World War and was in charge of the Small Arms Section, Engineering Division later. He also organized and was in charge of the Aircraft Armament Section of that office. He was specially designated as special assistant to the Chief of Ordnance, authorized to represent him on all matters relating to Trench Warfare Matériel, Small Arms, and Machine Gun Matériel, and later was in charge of the combined Small Arms and Antiaircraft Armament Division of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance.

He has been Professor of Ordnance and Gunnery at the United States Military Academy and is a graduate of the Ordnance School of Technology, Ordnance School of Application, and has an M.E. degree from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff School, the Army Industrial College, and the Army War College.

We are particularly fortunate in having him address us on the subject of the Organization of the Office of The Assistant Secretary of War because he is the Executive Assistant in charge thereof. I know of no better way to express the debt that the Army and the Ordnance Department particularly owe to Colonel McFarland than to read the citation given him when the Distinguished Medal was awarded him. It reads as follows:

"First in charge of the design, development, and production of all machine guns, automatic rifles, and accessories thereto for the Army of the United States, for service in organizing the industries of the country to meet the unprecedented demands for automatic arms created after the entrance of the United States into the World War, and later as special assistant to the Chief of Ordnance in charge of all matters pertaining to small arms, automatic arms, and equipment."

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Colonel McFarland.

ORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
SECRETARY OF WAR

Colonel Jordan and Gentlemen:

Colonel Jordan, you are a very gracious introducer. You are very kind and very generous.

The subject which has been assigned to me by Colonel Jordan and which you will observe from your weekly schedule of instruction is very limited, deals with the organization and duties of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War, but excludes all those interesting and important duties pertaining to the procurement planning activities, the current procurement activities, and the absorbing subjects to which you are devoting your close attention this year in the course of instruction followed at the Army Industrial College.

When I realized this situation, it seemed to me that there was little or nothing left for me to talk about; and what I do say may be entirely familiar to all of you. In fact, I think there is nothing new on my particular subject; but perhaps my arrangement may cause you to think of it in a different way, or it may, at least, recall to you things and conditions that have slipped from your minds.

To begin with, the Office of the Assistant Secretary and its organization are both dependent upon the well-known part of the National Defense Act, known as Section 5-a. This is a section that is referred to and read, time and time again. So I shall read it again at the very outset of my talk.

"Sec. 5-a. Hereafter, in addition to such duties as may be assigned him by the Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, under the direction of the Secretary of War, shall be charged with supervision of the procurement of all military supplies and other business of the War Department pertaining thereto and the assurance of adequate provision for the mobilization of materiel and industrial organizations essential to war-time needs." \*\*\*

Please note particularly the phrase in the section which I have just read which says "under the direction of the Secretary of War" because I shall speak of this again. Also, please let me call attention to the two words "pertaining thereto", because these words limit the Assistant Secretary

of War to matters pertaining to the procurement of military supplies and does not simply mean "other business of the War Department" of which there is much, which, of course, is handled under the supervision of the Secretary himself and never comes to the attention of the Assistant Secretary or of his office.

The organization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War is designed to meet the missions of the office. And these missions are defined by Section 5-a of the Act.

Now, if we were to look at an organizational chart of the War Department we would find the Secretary of War occupying the little square at the top with the Assistant Secretary and the Chief of Staff occupying the two squares in the next echelon. The development of these two sides of the War Department into their various elements and sections, you are entirely familiar with. You are familiar also with the duties which are assigned to these elements and sections. But please notice particularly one peculiarity; The supply services, such as Quartermaster Corps, Ordnance Department, Signal Corps, etc., appear in this chart with two chiefs - under the Chief of Staff they operate in regard to their military functions and under the Assistant Secretary of War they operate in regard to their procurement functions. But in functioning in their dual capacity, we do not discover any over-lapping and very few border line cases. The same relation exists in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War as exists in the offices of the General Staff in that they are entirely supervising agencies and do not operate.

Now, which of the various duties of the Assistant Secretary of War is the more important - procurement planning, industrial planning for war, or current procurement? Let me read to you a part of Mr. Woodring's annual report which is just now being sent to the printer.

"I consider that part of my statutory duties dealing with industrial preparedness of prime importance. The subject 'industrial preparedness', with its many ramifications and diversifications, is indeed a broad one. Its arteries, veins and nerves, affecting as they do the rights and welfare of our civilian body, both individually and collectively through business of every conceivable nature, merit study without end and of a high calibre. I feel that it is particularly unfortunate that the pressing nature of the current affairs of the Department, the determination of

86

awards on contracts for supplies immediately needed, the settlement of disputes in the interpretation of contracts in force, and similar business questions requiring answers before activities can be begun and men put to work, have made demands on my time which have precluded my devoting to industrial war planning the amount of personal attention which I hope to be able to give to it in the future. My only alternative is to satisfy myself that the present set-up of my office is such as to give to this great responsibility the deliberate study it deserves. This I have done."

The organization of the office of the Assistant Secretary of War that I have just mentioned has functioned and we think will function, but I was so impressed by the remarks of Mr. Peek a few days ago on the human element in organization that I copied what he said. Here it is.

"If there is any one impression I would like to leave with you today it is this. It is not the plan, it is not the moves that are laid out in advance that do the job, but it is men - just common everyday men that you want to rely on \*\*\*. It is exactly the same in getting your supplies in time of war.\*\*\* all the plans you may have in advance\*\*\* for supplying an Army may be of no value unless you take into consideration the human element\*\*\*. I want to emphasize the very great importance of keeping that human element alive in your preparations for emergency later on."

Though the human element is powerful - and may be all powerful after a plan is working, - the organization itself, especially under our condition of changing personnel, must be sound and logical, and assigned to work with whatever personnel, may be available, until time permits more suitable or agreeable personnel to be selected.

Having outlined the organization, let us see what is the background of this office of the Assistant Secretary of War.

The First Assistant Secretary was one Thomas A. Scott, appointed by Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Mr. L. B. Ingersoll, librarian of the War Department Library, prepared in 1879, a

history of the War Department in which he says, concerning this period of the first Assistant Secretary:

"The vast operations of the war thus rapidly sketched threw upon the War Department an additional amount of labors almost incredible. To supervise the administrative affairs pertaining to the Department during this long period of the republic's peril would have been beyond the capacity allotted to man. Early in the war Secretary Cameron, seeing the absolute necessity of direct aid in the discharge of his duties, by order made Colonel Thomas A. Scott 'assistant Secretary of War,' and he remained in the position during Mr. Cameron's further charge of the war office. Later, the office was created by law and eventually three assistant secretaries of war were authorized. These were P. H. Watson, John Tucker, and C. P. Wolcott. Upon the decease of Mr. Wolcott, Mr. Charles A. Dana was appointed. Mr. Watson, who had long been the law partner of Mr. Stanton was his principal lieutenant, and was consulted by him on all occasions of doubt and difficulty. Mr. Tucker had general charge of the matter of large contracts, and a special supervision of the chartering of steamers and steamboats. Mr. Wolcott had the supervision of the correspondence of great extent and variety growing out of the extraordinary circumstances of the war; as, for example, with the governors of States and other persons of importance or having business of unusual importance with the Department. Thus Secretary Stanton had about him and in his immediate direction a personal staff whose services during the war were invaluable."

But in 1866, the War being ended, the office of the Assistant Secretary was abolished, not to be re-established until 1890, 24 years later, during the presidency of Benjamin Harrison. The law reestablishing the office merely says:

"There shall be in the Department of War an Assistant Secretary of War who shall be appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and shall be entitled to a salary of \$4,500 a year, and who shall perform such duties in the Department of War as shall be prescribed by the Secretary or may be required by law."

This was the office about which Mr. Benedict Crowell, in 1918, made this remark:

"The ancient office of The Assistant Secretary of War has long been more or less of a political sinecure; a place of considerable honor almost without practical value or responsibility. The Office had become an eddy into which had drifted a few incidental and inconsequential functions, none of them directly related to the business of waging a war. It characterizes the office to say that its principal duty had been administering the national cemeteries."

However, we find in War Department Orders of 1890 and for the years following, directives showing the Assistant Secretary of War to be charged with numerous duties, including:

- Record and Pension Office Business
- Clemency cases and prisoners at military posts
- Claims and accounts
- Sales of subsistence to Civilians
- Privilege of occupancy of War Dept. land
- Open Market Purchases
- Matters relating to National Cemeteries

So Mr. Crowell may have been writing somewhat freely.

Between 1890 and 1917, Assistant Secretaries came and went, some well-known in their day and remembered now; but in 1917 began a series of Assistant Secretaries, all of whom are very familiar to us because of their interest in and association with the development of industrial mobilization and industrial plans.

Let me read these names:

Name	Whence Appointed	Date of Commission	Administration
Benedict Crowell	Ohio	Nov. 12, 1917	Woodrow Wilson
William R. Williams	Virginia	July 30, 1920	" "
J. Mayhew Wainwright	New York	Mar. 28, 1921	Warren G. Harding
Dwight F. Davis	Missouri	Mar. 5, 1923	" "
			Calvin Coolidge
Hanford MacNider	Iowa	Oct. 16, 1925	" "
Chas. B. Robbins	Iowa	Jan. 12, 1928	" "
Patrick J. Hurley	Oklahoma	Mar. 15, 1929	Herbert Hoover
Frederick H. Payne	Mass.	Apr. 29, 1930	" "
Harry H. Woodring	Kansas	Apr. 16, 1933	Franklin D. Roosevelt

Now, how did the present organization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War -- that is, the designation of duties to the Assistant Secretary of War - come about?

In 1903, the Congress of the United States acting under the stimulus of that grand statesman and friend of the Army, the then Secretary of War, Elihu Root, created the General Staff of the Army. May I read a few extracts from the General Staff Act:

\*\*\*\*"The Chief of Staff, under the direction of the President, or of the Secretary of War, under the direction of the President, shall have supervision of all troops of the line and of the Adjutant General's, Inspector-General's, Judge-Advocate's, Quartermaster's, Subsistence, Medical, Pay, and Ordnance Departments, the Corps of Engineers, and the Signal Corps, \*\*\*\*"

\*\*\*\*"All officers detailed in the General Staff Corps shall be exclusively employed in the study of military problems, the preparation of plans for the national defense, \*\*\* and hereafter members of the General Staff Corps shall be confined strictly to the discharge of the duties of the general nature of those specified for them\*\*\*\*, and they shall not be permitted to assume or engage in work of an administrative nature that pertains to established bureaus or offices of the War Department, or that,\*\*\*\* would involve impairment of the responsibility or initiative of such bureaus or offices,\*\*\* Provided\*\*, That all pay and allowances shall be forfeited by any superior for any period during which, by his order or his permission, or by reason of his neglect, any subordinate shall violate any of the foregoing provisions of this section\*\*\*"

"It is quite evident that Congress intended to have its mandate carried out.

Prior to this time, 1903, the supply bureaus of the War Department had become powerful machines in the Army and in politics. Their relation to the troops of the line might have become a case of the "tail wagging the dog", and the General Staff Act should have rendered this condition. But the Judge Advocate General of the Army later stated:

88

"Unmistakably, whether wisely or not, Congress has sought to preserve untouched the special jurisdiction of each of the several bureaus of the War Department.\*\*\*!"

And we know that immediately prior to our entrance in the World War the Supply Bureaus were practically independent of the General Staff and of each other. Whether on account of the law or because of the strength they had built up, they had managed to resist General Staff Control.

The World War showed, I think, that the efficiency of our General Staff in its distinctly military functions and in its staff training, was greatly superior to the efficiency of the supply departments, in their functions of procurement and industrial relations.

So we saw, as a result, the difficulties and the changes in which the Supply Bureaus were involved in the latter part of 1917 and in 1918. And it was at this time, November 12, 1917, that Mr. Benedict Crowell was appointed Assistant Secretary of War, and it was his experience between this date and November 11, 1918 - one year to a day, that gave him such strong convictions regarding Section 5-a of the National Defense Act of 1920.

At this point, I would like to read extracts of testimony before Congressional Committees regarding this section.

Concerning reorganization of the War Department at the end of 1917, Mr. Crowell stated:

"When things began to go wrong with the war industrial program, the Secretary of War saw in this unused office (of the Assistant Secretary of War) the opportunity to give to the War Department the thing which it then most sorely needed - industrial ability at the top of its organization. In November, 1917, he called to the office a man whose training and experience had been entirely in the industrial field, and turned over to his administration all the industrial activities of the War Department - gave to him literally a blanket commission to rescue our war industry from the plight into which it had fallen\*\*\*\* and\*\*\*\* Thereafter the Assistant Secretary of War was the industrial head of the War Department."

Mr. Crowell's testimony before this committee showed that he wanted the Undersecretary of War to be the Director of Munitions and charged by law directly with full responsibility for all activities relating to munitions supply. That is, he would divorce the Undersecretary from the Secretary, and set up an agency independent, at least in its procurement activities, from the remainder of the War Department. From Mr. Baker's testimony we shall see that the words "under the direction of the Secretary of War", appearing in Section 5-a, were inserted because of the testimony of Mr. Baker himself. It would be interesting to speculate on how the War Department would now be functioning and what the status and organization of our office would be if those few words "under the direction of the Secretary of War" had been omitted. There's an interesting problem for you. If you work it out, I should like to see the answer.

Mr. Crowell's testimony continues:

"The Chairman. Would you have the Director of Munitions an Army Officer?"

Mr. Crowell: No, a civilian.

The Chairman: You would not even commission him?

Mr. Crowell: No, I would not.

Senator Chamberlain: Why?

Mr. Crowell: It is a question for a man with an industrial mind, and I do not think it is possible to find such men in the Army. I think it is important that he should retain his civilian status. His dealings are all industrial dealings with the great industries of the country, and I see no advantage to be obtained by putting him in uniform."

A very good statement, I think, and still applicable.

And about this same time, we have the Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, Mr. Hull of Iowa, a helpful friend of the Army, saying:

"To speak frankly in reference to this, this subcommittee is a little weary of the friction that exists between the bureaus and the staff on the one side, and between the different bureaus themselves;

and if we could get it straightened out in the law, prescribing certain general principles, by which the bureaus would govern themselves, and the General Staff govern itself, we would be happy."

And then we hear Mr. Baker:

"\*\*My assistant, Mr. Crowell, is very much in favor of having an inelastic statutory provision which will put the supply bureaus under the Undersecretary. I think he is wrong about that. He and I have talked it over many times and I think he is wrong for this reason: He believes that in times of peace you can get a man to be Undersecretary of War who is a captain of industry and has had so much business experience that he can be safely intrusted with such responsibility and not be subject to very much supervision by the Secretary of War in the administration of the supply bureaus. I do not believe that. Ordinarily, I think you can get men of prominence and large experience to hold the cabinet offices or the first places, but I do not believe that ordinarily you can look forward in times of peace to getting men of very large experience to occupy the undersecretaryship or the assistant Secretaryship.

"I make no reflection whatever upon the men who have held these places in the War Department, or any other department; they have been men of good quality, but you can not look back upon the Undersecretaries of any public department, with now and then a striking exception, and discover men who have been very largely successful in private affairs."

Then he goes on to say:

"\*\* Let me illustrate what I have in mind. If the Secretary of War is a lawyer, like Mr. Root or Mr. Taft, he would undoubtedly want as an assistant or undersecretary a man of very large industrial experience, if he could get him, to have charge of the supply bureaus. That would be where he would feel the need of assistance most. But suppose the Secretary of War is a man like Mr. Schwab - and I can easily imagine Mr. Schwab being Secretary of War - if Mr. Schwab were Secretary of War he would not want someone else to

be in charge of the supply bureaus and ordnance department; that would be the part of the job he would want for his own special talents, and he would want a lawyer, probably, as undersecretary, a man who could deal with the intricate legal problems that are constantly arising in the War Department."

Thus was developed the familiar Section 5-a, which is the text for every sermon we preach and the authority for everything we do. But this Act, which controls such a vital part of our efforts, itself contains an anomaly. It says that the duties of the General Staff shall be, among other things, to prepare plans for the mobilization of the Nation's material resources in an emergency. But Section 5-a charges the Assistant Secretary with "the assurance of adequate provision for the mobilization of materiel and organizations, essential to war-time needs."

It appears that the provision in the law pertaining to the Assistant Secretary was new; and that pertaining to the General Staff was old, having occurred in the National Defense Act of 1916, and was not changed to make it consistent with the new provision of the law.

However, in the summer of 1921, the often mentioned Harbord Board with Major General James G. Harbord as its head, met in Washington to study and report on various phases of War Department organization. The conclusions of the Board are comprehensive, very interesting, and very important.

In defining the duties of the General Staff, the Board did not omit the words "material resources" but in the General Orders that followed and in the Army Regulations of today, these words are omitted, thus removing any doubt or danger of conflict concerning the duty and responsibility of planning for the mobilization of the material resources of the Nation - this duty is left exclusively to the Assistant Secretary of War.

There is a feeling in certain quarters of the Army that the Assistant Secretary of War should be removed as one of the principal characters in the current War Department picture and placed in the scenery merely as a "stooge" without statutory responsibilities - in the position occupied by the Assistant Secretary of War prior to the arrival of Mr. Crowell. One of the student groups at this institution a year or two ago submitted a study called "Plan A", which proposed that

the present statutory duties of the Assistant Secretary of War be removed from his charge and become the responsibility of a second Deputy Chief of Staff; that there be two Deputy Chiefs of Staff: one charged with supervision of functions now exercised by the General Staff, the other charged with the statutory functions now exercised by the Assistant Secretary of War. A chart of such an organization would be merely a straight line chart, showing the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary and Chief of Staff in the main vertical column with the First Deputy Chief of Staff and the Second Deputy Chief of Staff branching from the rectangle representing the Chief of Staff. The organizations under the first and second deputies would, in turn, be similar to the organizations now under the Deputy Chief of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of War.

The advantages of this plan, as given by this student group, were only two:

- 1. Simplification of procurement management structure.
- 2. Improved liaison between using arms and supplying services.

The disadvantages listed included:

- 1. Change of statute and abandonment of present procurement planning structure in vogue since 1920.
- 2. Abandonment of progress in organization and in indoctrination.
- 3. Abandonment of management structure which has been satisfactory.
- 4. Navy Department might not cooperate with Army General Staff.
- 5. Planning Section of General Staff could not be expected to function better than present planning section of OASW.
- 6. General Staff not suited for civilian contact.
- 7. General Staff is organization of men not trained along lines of industry or political economy.

Really, I see no merit in such a proposal; and frankly, I don't think it is worth worrying about because I feel sure that the informed industrial interests of the country and the informed

members of Congress are thoroughly in accord with the present organization, and that if a reorganization along the lines mentioned should be proposed, it would have violent opposition and meager support.

In addition to these statutory duties that we have been discussing, the Assistant Secretary of War has "such other duties as may be delegated by the Secretary." These delegated duties are important. They are listed in Orders E, a War Department publication which is not given general distribution but which is of frequent use in the offices of the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary. Orders E specifies that the Secretary of War reserves to himself final action upon papers relating to certain subjects which are listed. The orders then assign to the Assistant Secretary of War, the supervision and necessary action upon matters including: All his statutory duties and certain non-statutory duties which, from time to time, have been delegated to him by the Secretary. Some of the more interesting of these latter may be enumerated:

The sale or disposal of surplus supplies, equipment, plants, land or other facilities.

Claims, foreign or domestic, by or against the War Department, including those resulting from the operation of aircraft.

The purchase and sale of real estate; the lease of real estate for the use of the War Department; the granting of leases or licenses, etc.

Clemency cases in mitigation or remission of sentence by courts-martial.

The activities of the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Civilian Marksmanship.

Matters relating to national cemeteries.

Regulations for burial expenses of deceased military personnel.

And certain other matters.

For these delegated duties, the Assistant Secretary of War actually becomes the Acting Secretary of War, and is removed from the square he usually occupies on any chart of the War Department and occupies the same square as the Secretary. Thus, he has the facilities not only of his own office but of the whole War

91

Department at his disposal and can use any in its proper sphere. If, in his delegated duties, he becomes involved in a question which pertains to one of the General Staff sections it is entirely proper for him to refer the question to the General Staff instead of referring it to the officers in his own organization. This was illustrated at a time when matters pertaining to the National Guard and the Organized Reserves were delegated to the Assistant Secretary of War. In dealing with these matters, he merely became the agent of the Secretary and handled the questions exactly as the Secretary would have handled them, that is, through the Chief of Staff and the General Staff branches and divisions concerned.

I mentioned Mr. Peek's remark that regardless of perfection of paper organization, the personal element was more important than the chart. So in the relation of the branches of the Assistant Secretary's office, the personal contact establishes the relationship. I am sure each section knows what the other is doing and that there is complete harmony and understanding. I can say also that our relationship with the General Staff is harmonious and friendly and, though we have had some bitter disagreements, we think we have settled them as amicable as have the different divisions of the General Staff settled their own differences.

The Assistant Secretary of War has a representative on the Budget Advisory Committee of the War Department so we have a voice in that most important activity of the Army. The Executive Officer of the Assistant Secretary of War is a member of the General Council - that very powerful body composed of the G-s and the Chiefs of Arms and Services of the War Department. And the Congress itself has created the War Council - consisting of the Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, and the Chief of Staff. I have observed that the recent election has interfered with the office routine of our two secretaries but the War Council has regularly been held each day at noon. I consider these meetings a most important feature of the operation of the War Department. It draws together the three chief officers in a close and informal way, permits each to become acquainted with and understand the difficulties and the problems of the other, and develops a mutual respect and friendship that makes cooperation easy at a time when you expect it to be hard.

The law reads:

"The Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, the General of the Army, and the Chief of Staff shall constitute the War Council of the War Department, which council shall from time to time meet and consider policies affecting both the military and munitions problems of the War Department. Such questions shall

be presented to the Secretary of War in the War Council, and his decision with reference to such questions of policy, after consideration of the recommendations thereon by the several members of the War Council, shall constitute the policy of the War Department with reference thereto."

In speaking of the War Council, the Harbord Board says;

"\*\*\* the law definitely brings about within the War Department organization, that essential element of military efficiency, the subordination of administration to command, by placing upon one authority (the Secretary of War) the decision as to questions of military policy."

This War Council is a fine institution - little talked of but great in effectiveness.

This completes the list of topics I have noted for discussion. If I were to summarize the essentials of my talk I think I would say: The organization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War, simple and elastic, stabilized for the moment but ready for modification with the rapidly changing conditions of government, is so designed as to carry out in peace-time, normal or emergency, or in war-time, the duties given to the Assistant Secretary by statute and by delegation.

And now having finished, let me add one idea that I haven't mentioned before; and I'll put this idea in the words of Mr. Frank Scott, of whom you all know. In answer to a question, after a lecture here a year or two ago, he said:

"We are pretty well prepared to procure necessary war supplies for the next war. Our plant capacities are worked out and allocated, and we have sufficient capacity for the war effort. We can get munitions and guns and airplanes and trucks. It looks encouraging for us. But, all of these plans are based on the last war! Don't leave your imagination in the bottom drawer of your desk. I want to ask you if the next war, industrially, will be like the last one?"

Thank you, gentlemen, it has been a privilege to appear before you.