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FORD, VINCENT T. FORD:
Unpublished Manuscript "Twenty-Four Minutes To Checkmate," 1953-1957

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Vincent T. Ford, who served on the staff of the Department of the Air Force, Office of the Special Assistant for Research and Development during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, deposited his unpublished manuscript in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in 1992. In August 1992 Mr. Ford executed an instrument of gift for these papers. The donor retains copyright in his writings in all papers donated to the U.S. Government. After the donor's death, all said rights shall pass to Col. Edmund W. Milauckas, if he survives the donor, for his lifetime, or until the copyright expires, whichever event occurs first. Upon that event all such rights shall pass to the Government.

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Approximate number of items: 1

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SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Vincent T. Ford's manuscript contains an opening chapter which describes the history of missile development in the U.S. from 1918 to the 1950's. It also devotes a few early chapters to the 1947 to 1953 period when an unofficial, informal group, which he labels the "kitchen cabinet," in Air Force Research and Development were working to promote ICBM development. Ford profiles these individuals and describes their efforts.

The bulk of the manuscript covers the period from 1953 to 1957, and it illustrates the various individuals, committees, corporations, and agencies who worked to establish a crash program for ICBM's. Mr. Ford was working for Air Force Research and Development during this period, and he offers many personal insights into the different personalities involved in missile development and the influence they had on it. Some of the key personalities who are described by Ford include Theodore Von Karman, Major General Donald Putt, Brig. Gen. Gordon P. Saville, Trevor Gardner, Col. Ben A. Schriever, General Curtis LeMay, Tom Power, James Killian, Harold Talbott, Donald Quarles, Dr. Von Neumann, Dr. Charles C. Lauritsen, Dr. George Kistiakowsky, Jerome B. Wiesner, Dr. Edward Teller, Dr. Louis Dunn, Col. Terence A. Terhune, Hyde Gillette, David Z. Beckler, Gen. Nathan Twining, Charles E. Wilson, and Walter Robertson. Ford offers candid evaluations of the roles various individuals and agencies played in the ICBM project.

Ford devotes considerable text to the Von Neumann Nuclear Weapons Committee, including details on its recruiting of members, meetings, reports, and recommendations. He also comments on the efforts of other government entities which played a role in ICBM development. These include the Gillette Committee, the Advisory Group for Aeronautical Research and Development (AGARD), the Air Research and Development Command, the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, the Office of Research and Development, Air Force, the President's Science Advisory Committee, and the Gardner Missiles Evaluation Committee.

The efforts by Air Force R and D personnel and their allies to establish an accelerated Atlas project are described in detail. Other subjects which Ford comments on are the various contractors working on the Atlas project, the civil defense dispersal policy, the Gillette procedures for speeding up missile research and development, the Titan two-stage missile, the IRBM (Thor), conflicting Air Force programs, such as SAC and the need for bombers.

A large part of the final chapter of the manuscript gives extensive coverage to the last year of Von Neumann's life, including his lengthy illness and death on February 8, 1957.

Key meetings involving the President are also highlighted in this manuscript. The President and the National Security Council were briefed on the Atlas project on July 28, 1955, and as a result it was given the status of "highest national priority." Herbert Hoover, Jr., Harold Stassen, and Richard Nixon are credited with playing a key role in this event. The NSC was given another briefing on missiles at Camp David on December 1, 1955.

This manuscript offers some unique insights into the processes involved in researching and developing a major new weapons system. It goes into considerable detail on the effects of personality conflicts, office politics, and Pentagon in-fighting on the work of Air Force Research and Development in developing the ICBM program. Since Mr. Ford was working for Air Force R and D, the manuscript is written from the standpoint of someone who was in the middle of these events, someone who was on the “inside,” assisting in the Atlas Project.

The entire manuscript is open to researchers with the exception of a brief phrase on one page. It is withheld for national security reasons.

CONTAINER LIST

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Volume I (2) [chapter 2, Air Force Missile Activity, 1950's; chapter 3, Kitchen Cabinet; informal group in Air Force Research and Development who supported ICBM development (1947-1953)-Dr. Theodore Von Karman, Major General Donald Putt, Brigadier General Gordon P. Saville; The Air Research and Development Command]

Volume I (3) [chapter 3, Kitchen Cabinet; Von Karman; AGARD-Advisory Group for Aeronautical Research and Development; Major T. F. Walkowicz; General MacCloskey; Saville; Putt; Air Force Scientific Advisory Board; profiles of members of "Kitchen Cabinet"]

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