Harry H. Woodring

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Washington, D.C., was bustling with activity in the spring of 1933 when Harry Woodring assumed his new position as Assistant Secretary of War. There was action throughout the city as the forces of President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched a full-scale attack on the worst depression the country had ever experienced. The eyes of the nation were focused on “FDR” as he pushed through Congress an unbelievable array of legislation—the New Deal was marching in. Bills establishing a host of new agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, National Recovery Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, sailed through the legislative branch; and before long, an array of alphabetical designations, such as FERA, CCC, NRA, AAA, and TVA, had become an important part of America’s vocabulary. As the citizens grew increasingly aware of the many new agencies and their activities, they also became familiar with the creators and administrators of those programs. Such names as Frances Perkins, Harold Ickes, Henry Wallace, Harry Hopkins, Raymond Moley, and Rexford Tugwell were soon known to most Americans.\(^1\)

As the New Deal advanced, most governmental departments, such as Treasury, Labor, Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce, saw a rapid growth in their activities, obligations, expenditures, and personnel.\(^2\) However, not all departments were experiencing across-the-board expansion; several, most notably the War and Navy departments, saw their responsibilities increased,
but at the same time they experienced reductions in budgets and manpower. With the Roosevelt administration engrossed in matters of relief, recovery, and reform, there was little time and even less money for defense. Consequently, the military services, especially the Army, felt the full impact of the nation's economic collapse. That the leaders of the military establishment were able to tolerate such a state of affairs so graciously was primarily a result of the years of military neglect that they had witnessed and experienced.

There is much validity to the adage that in peacetime "we Americans treat our Army like a mangy old dog." Many times in the history of the United States the Army has been permitted to deteriorate to a dangerously low level of effectiveness, but at no time were negligence of and indifference to it greater than during the two decades following World War I. The 1920s saw Army strength dip to a low of 135,000 officers and men (only 35,000 more than the limit imposed on Germany to keep her militarily impotent). Furthermore, the force was not only lacking in manpower, but in equipment and training as well. Dwight Davis, who served as Calvin Coolidge's Secretary of War from 1925 to 1929, referred to the early 1920s as "those discouraging years of curtailment of activities, reductions, demotions and disinterestedness on the part of the public." Although the situation was bad under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, it became even worse under President Hoover, who, when the Depression hit, came to the conclusion that the best place to start reducing government expenditures was the Army. Apathy and economy so decimated the United States war machine in the late 1920s and early 1930s that it soon reached the lowest degree of effectiveness that it had known since before the war. According to the 1933 Annual Report of the Chief of Staff, the United States Army ranked seventeenth among the standing armies of the world. Such was the state of military affairs when the Roosevelt administration assumed the reins of government. Although the Republican Chief Executives of the 1920s must bear much of the blame for the decline of the military, the responsibility is not theirs alone, because they reflected the attitudes of both Congress and the American public.

When Woodring entered the War Department in the spring of 1933, it was organized in accordance with the provisions of the National Defense Act of 1920. Heading the organization was the Secretary of War, who was directly responsible to the President for raising and training the Army. Additional military responsibilities included providing for the defense of the insular possessions and the coast of the continental United States, and the developing of new weapons and material. The position also carried with it certain nonmilitary functions, such as the maintenance and operation of the Panama Canal; administration of the government of the Philippines, Puerto
Rico, and the Canal Zone; development of inland waterways and administration of the Inland Waterways Corporation; formulation and execution of flood-control measures; and the maintenance and administration of the United States Military Academy. 10

To fill the number one post at the War Department, Roosevelt appointed former Utah Governor George H. Dern. This was not a particularly wise choice, because the affable, soft-spoken Dern had no knowledge of and little interest in the Army. Born near Hooper, Nebraska, in 1872, the strapping young farm boy had gone to the University of Nebraska, where he captained the football team. In 1895 he left college and moved with his family to Utah, where his father became a part owner of a small gold-mining company. Starting out as a bookkeeper, young Dern rose in the ranks, eventually becoming manager of the Mercur Gold Mining Company, one of the largest in the state. During these years Dern made several major contributions to metallurgical processing—most notably the creation of a vacuum slime filtration process and, in conjunction with Theodore P. Holt, the development of the world-famous Holt-Dern ore-reduction system. In 1914 the wealthy and well-known metallurgist ventured into politics, being elected a State Senator. Ten years in the legislature enabled him to learn the ropes of state government, and in 1924 he ran for, and was elected, Governor, a post that he held for eight years. As a progressive Democrat, Dern gained national prominence by sponsoring Workman’s Compensation and Public Utilities acts, by instituting tax reforms, and by leading a successful fight to gain recognition of the principle that the water of streams belongs to the states and not to the federal government. In 1931 he became a strong Roosevelt supporter, and as a reward he received the War post rather than the Interior position which he had coveted. 11

Initially, Dern’s appointment created little enthusiasm among military leaders, many of whom considered him a pacifist, but they soon warmed up to him. Unfortunately the new Secretary was able to offer little leadership to the Army during his tenure. His failure stemmed in part from his lack of familiarity with the military and his lack of interest in the activities of the War Department, but the major problem was his deteriorating health. Already failing when he accepted the job, the health of the sixty-one-year-old Secretary became progressively worse with each passing year. High blood pressure and a weak heart sapped more and more of his energy, and as a result, he was frequently away from his office for weeks at a time. Almost from the day that he took office there were rumors that his condition would force him to resign, but he refused to do so, and the warm-hearted Roosevelt could not bring himself to ask for his resignation. Consequently, the War
Department lumbered through Roosevelt's first term with a sick man at the helm.\textsuperscript{13}

One step below the Secretary in the departmental hierarchy was the Assistant Secretary of War. The Assistant, who, like his immediate superior, was a civilian, had as his primary responsibility the procurement of all military supplies. His additional major duties included the development of plans and procedures to insure that industry would be able to produce the supplies needed in war time (industrial mobilization), the sale and disposal of surplus supplies, the purchase and sale of military real estate, and the settlement of claims by and against the Army. Furthermore, when the Secretary was absent, the Assistant became the acting head of the department, with all the authority and responsibility that the number one job entailed.\textsuperscript{14} With Dern's health being what it was, Woodring frequently found himself carrying the Secretary's burdens as well as his own.

The third-ranking member of the War Department was the Chief of Staff. This post, which was filled by a professional soldier, was, next to that of Commander in Chief, the highest-ranking military position in the United States Army. In addition to serving as the Secretary's immediate adviser on all military matters, the Chief of Staff was responsible for planning and executing the Army's plans for national defense. To assist him in this enormous task he had an Assistant Chief of Staff, General Staff, Special Staff, and numerous other advisory and administrative personnel.\textsuperscript{15}

Occupying the position of Chief of Staff when Woodring arrived at the War Department was one of the most able military leaders the United States had ever produced, Gen. Douglas MacArthur. He graduated from West Point in 1903 and then, as a junior officer, served as a military aide to his famous father, Gen. Arthur MacArthur, and to President Theodore Roosevelt. According to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, he had emerged from World War I as "the greatest American field commander produced by the war."\textsuperscript{16} When the conflict was over, MacArthur returned to West Point, where, as the youngest superintendent in the history of the academy, he instituted a number of far-reaching changes in the instructional and physical-training programs. In 1925 his military genius was further recognized when he became the youngest Major General in the Army. Because MacArthur's fame continued to spread, it came as no surprise when, in November 1930, President Hoover appointed him Chief of Staff.\textsuperscript{17} During his long military career, MacArthur had come to realize the importance of getting along with his superiors; thus, it was not unusual that he developed a warm and smooth relationship with Secretary Dern and with Assistant Secretary Woodring.\textsuperscript{18}

To those promilitary advocates in the nation's capital who hoped that the coming of Roosevelt would bring better times for the United States
Army, the early days of the New Deal brought a rude awakening. Shortly after taking office, the new President shocked them by urging a $144 million cut in Army appropriations, the forced retirement of four thousand officers, and a twelve-thousand-man reduction in enlisted strength. An immediate outcry from the War Department, along with severe criticism from a number of influential newspapers and patriotic organizations, ultimately resulted in the restoration of some of the proposed cuts. Nevertheless, the 1934 budget provided a mere $227 million for military purposes—down more than $52 million from the year before, and the lowest outlay since before the war.\(^{19}\)

Although Secretary Dern was forced to reduce Army expenditures not just to the bone but “into the bone,” he did all that he could to cut spending in the civilian side of the department, so that the military forces, which General MacArthur maintained were already “below the point of safety,” would not suffer further.\(^{20}\) Such efforts, however, achieved only limited success. While the austerity programs did not lead to a reduction of military personnel, as had originally been feared, they did result in a virtual halt in the development of weapons and equipment, the curtailment of training exercises, the continued use of inadequate and obsolete equipment, and reductions in the activities of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and the National Guard.\(^{21}\) By the mid 1930s the United States Army was nearing an all-time low in terms of national favor, funds, and effectiveness.\(^{22}\)

While the Army suffered considerably under the impact of the Great Depression, it paradoxically benefited from it via the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). In an effort to help provide economic relief and at the same time preserve the nation’s natural resources, Congress, at the President’s urging, created the CCC in April 1933. The new program, under the direction of Robert Fechner, started as a joint operation of the Departments of Labor, Interior, Agriculture, and War. Initially the Army had the responsibility of enrolling, supplying, and providing very limited supervision over the conservation activities of more than 350,000 young men located in more than thirteen hundred CCC camps throughout the country. When it soon became evident, however, that the civilian departments were unable to carry out their responsibilities, the mammoth task was almost completely turned over to the Army, even though Fechner remained the director of the program.\(^{23}\) Consequently, in June of 1933 the War Department turned its attention from the military army to the newly created civilian army. Few officials, military or civilian, were more involved in the CCC than was the Assistant Secretary of War. Purchasing or leasing the land for the camps and providing the necessary food, clothing, blankets, and personal supplies for more than one-third of a million men was no easy task; but Woodring, who spent most of his first eight months in office dealing with CCC matters,
proved to be an able administrator, so the massive logistical demands were met successfully.24

Toward the end of 1933 the Regular Army personnel who had carried on the bulk of the CCC supervision began to be replaced by specially trained civilian personnel, so that the venture lost a great deal of the military air that it had previously possessed. Whether the CCC activities of 1933 and early 1934 helped or hindered the Army was, and continues to be, a source of considerable speculation. Some War Department officials, including Woodring, tended to emphasize the assets of the program. Those individuals pointed to such benefits as the leadership training that it provided for junior officers and the experience that it provided in mobilizing a moderately large number of men. Others connected with the military, such as Secretary Dern, complained that the CCC took thousands of officers and key enlisted personnel out of the Regular Army, thereby making it useless in the event that it was immediately needed. There was one point on which all those associated with the War Department agreed: the virtual halt of military training and the utilization of reserve war supplies such as clothing, boots, and blankets could have dire consequences in time of emergency.25 There was no question that the CCC was a mixed blessing as far as the Army was concerned.

Just as the War Department received some benefits from the CCC, it did likewise from projects of the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Between 1933 and 1938 more than $250 million was spent on work-relief projects that provided the Army with sorely needed facilities and supplies.26 Through the PWA and the WPA the Army received such things as hospitals, gymnasiums, ammunition, motor vehicles, aircraft, and new housing for officers and enlisted personnel. While the primary purpose behind such projects was to provide work for the unemployed (pump-priming projects), they did serve to provide the Army with buildings, equipment, and ammunition that, in all likelihood, it would not otherwise have received.

The year 1933 was busy yet relatively uneventful as far as Assistant Secretary Woodring’s official activities were concerned; however, in the social realm, an event took place that was to have a profound effect on his subsequent personal and political careers. On 25 July 1933 the forty-six-year-old Kansan’s life as a bachelor came to an end when he married Helen Coolidge, the beautiful and talented daughter of Democratic Senator Marcus A. Coolidge of Massachusetts. Helen, whose father had made a modest fortune in the machine-tool business before entering the Senate in 1931, had all the advantages that wealth and social standing could provide. Born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in 1906, she had received a fine education
at the Mary C. Wheeler School in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Bradford Academy in her home state. While showing exceptional talent both as a writer and as a painter, she preferred to pursue a career in the latter; thus, she went to Boston and studied at the Howard Walker School of Fine Art. When her father took his seat in the Senate in 1931, Helen moved to Washington—a place that she found most agreeable. Her fame as an artist quickly spread throughout the capital city, and before long, she was sketching and painting portraits of many of her father's colleagues. Being gifted, attractive, and very personable, she inevitably acquired a large circle of friends and an equally large number of suitors: Helen Coolidge was soon one of the most sought-after young ladies on the Washington social scene.

Since she was the daughter of a Democratic Senator, it was only natural that Helen soon found herself caught up in the activities of the National Women's Democratic Club, and it was through that organization that she first met her husband-to-be. On 11 December 1931 she attended a meeting of the club, at which she heard an address by the Governor of Kansas, Harry Woodring. At a reception afterwards, national Democratic leader Jouett Shouse introduced her to him. Woodring was immediately impressed with her grace and charm, and he promised to call on her the next time he was in Washington.

Six months later, in May 1932, Woodring fulfilled his pledge by stopping off in Washington to spend a few days in the company of Miss Coolidge. On that visit something happened to Harry Woodring that had never happened before—he fell in love. Before departing, he asked her to marry him, but she was unwilling to take such an important step after a courtship of only a few days. The two agreed to keep in touch with one another, and in the following months they corresponded regularly. In January 1933, when Woodring moved to Washington, they began to see each other regularly, and soon she began to feel for him what he had felt for her. Therefore, in June, when he proposed a second time, she accepted. Six weeks later the couple were married in an elaborate ceremony at the Coolidge residence in Fitchburg, and after a honeymoon in Europe the newlyweds took up residence at the Mayflower Hotel.

Because of Helen's charm and grace and Harry's personality and position, the Woodrings soon became one of the most prominent couples in the nation's capital. They were continually entertaining, and being entertained by, cabinet members, congressmen, generals, ambassadors, and foreign dignitaries. Their active social life was instrumental in their acquisition of numerous friends in the administration, on the Hill, at the War Department, and among members of the news media. Official Washington tended to look upon the Woodrings as the perfect couple—a view that especially seemed to
be held by FDR. There can be no doubt that Helen Woodring was a major asset to her husband and his career; her importance was to become more evident as the decade rolled on.

Although Woodring's first eight months at the War Department were relatively quiet, routine, and noncontroversial, such a state of affairs was not destined to continue. The year 1934 opened with a bang, and before the end of January the Assistant Secretary of War was one of the most controversial men in Washington. Harry's troubles began when his article entitled "The American Army Stands Ready" appeared in the 6 January issue of Liberty Magazine. In this story he claimed that the Army was "the only branch of the government . . . organized and available not only to defend our territory, but also to cope with social and economic problems in an emergency." He then proposed that the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps be expanded and placed under the control of the military. If this were done, the Army could organize the CCC men, the World War veterans, and the people on relief "into a system of economic storm troops that could support the government's efforts to smash the depression."

To propose such action and to use a phrase like "economic storm troops" at that particular time was quite unfortunate, because the country was becoming increasingly alarmed over reports from Europe concerning the actions of Adolf Hitler's and Benito Mussolini's "storm troopers." In an immediate reaction against the article the White House was flooded with letters and telegrams demanding that the President remove Woodring at once. Typical of the messages received was one from the noted historian Charles A. Beard, who called the article "the first fascist threat from the War Department." Beard warned Roosevelt that such threats "spread distrust of your intentions and your administration." He concluded by asking FDR "to wash your hands of the fascist doctrine and to remove Woodring within fifteen minutes."

In the days that followed, the demands for removal grew in number and intensity. On 24 January a letter signed by some two hundred educators from thirty Eastern colleges and universities was made public in New York. It demanded that Assistant Secretary Woodring "be forced to resign his public office" because his proposals were "not even a thinly veiled advocacy of the German Nazi's dictatorship methods." The signers expressed a fear that if such an attitude prevailed in the War Department, it meant that the country was being prepared for "such an abuse of powers as is intolerable to contemplate." Two days after the letter was released, it and the controversy with which it dealt were brought up on the Senate floor by Senator Thomas Schall of Minnesota; however, they occasioned no debate or discussion. Still, the demands for Woodring's removal flowed into the White House.
When the controversy first arose, the President tried to ignore the matter, but by early February the whole affair had reached such proportions that he asked his Press Secretary, Steve Early, to contact Woodring and straighten the matter out. In the meantime, Roosevelt made it clear that it was his steadfast policy to maintain civilian, not military, control over the CCC camps. When a reporter asked the President if he cared to comment on Woodring's article, he answered in the negative, and then added, "I have been very careful not to read it." In this way he kept from becoming involved. Steve Early, in whose lap the problem now lay, privately criticized Woodring for saying things that gave the impression that the policies of the War Department were at odds with those of the President. Woodring explained to Early and then to Roosevelt that he felt that the whole matter was not as serious as the press and some critics of the administration had made it appear. He maintained that the criticism was due to the placing of a literal interpretation on the term "economic storm troops." According to the Assistant Secretary, "I used this term as a figure of speech just as many people currently refer to the recovery efforts of the government as a war against depression." This explanation apparently satisfied the President, for he did no more than warn the Assistant Secretary to be more careful in the future. The press was also satisfied with Woodring's latest statement, and by mid February the whole matter had been dropped.36

The controversy over the CCC article did several things for the Assistant Secretary of War. First, it made him a nationally known figure. Unfortunately, however, the image that he first cast was not a good one, and for years a number of Americans would continue to remember him only as a man with "fascist" ideas. Second, it indicated that it would take a real blunder on Woodring's part to bring the wrath of the President down on him. Receiving only a reprimand probably made the Assistant Secretary feel that he was relatively free to say what he wished. Third, neither Roosevelt nor Woodring was stampeded into action when a vocal section of the electorate became inflamed. This was evident from the fact that neither man considered the public's demand for resignation as a solution to the problem. It would seem that all the furor over the article should have taught the outspoken Kansan to be more careful about what he said, but the next six years were to show that it did not.

While those individuals who were upset over the CCC article were still clamoring for Woodring's scalp, a series of events occurred that was to place the Assistant Secretary in even hotter water. His new problems surfaced on 6 February, when the District of Columbia grand jury began to investigate "irregularities in the awarding of army contracts," specifically those relating to the procurement of motor vehicles and aircraft and to the disposal of
surplus materials. On the same day that the grand jury convened, Secretary Dern and President Roosevelt publicly called for a complete investigation in order to determine whether lobbyists or Army officials were involved in any “wrongdoing” in the awarding of contracts.

The announcement of the grand-jury probe came as no real surprise in light of recent rumors floating around the capital that favoritism had become the determining factor in the awarding of millions of dollars worth of Army contracts for trucks, cars, and motorcycles. The contracts in question had been granted in conjunction with two PWA grants that the War Department had received in late 1933; one was for $10 million to be used for motor vehicles, while the other, for $7.5 million, was to be used for aircraft and aircraft equipment. No sooner had the first contracts been let in December 1933, than disappointed bidders began to voice complaints that the awards were unfair because they had been unduly influenced by lobbyists. This questioning of the manner in which the War Department obtained its equipment immediately brought Woodring into the picture, because, as Assistant Secretary of War, he was the individual directly responsible for the procurement and disposal of all army equipment and supplies, including aircraft.

War Department officials were not surprised by the grand-jury inquiry, because they had helped to initiate it. Woodring and Secretary Dern had first heard the rumors concerning contracts in late 1933, and in January 1934 the Secretary asked the Attorney General to investigate the matter. One month later the Justice Department made its findings known to Dern, who in turn made them available to the District Attorney of the District of Columbia. One of the things brought out by the Attorney General’s investigation was that the activities of Joseph Silverman, Jr., a New York trader in army surplus goods, were “questionable”; thus, on 5 February, Woodring issued an order barring Silverman from doing further business with the War Department until the grand jury’s investigation had been completed. That announcement, which was followed by the President’s call for a full inquiry, immediately led to numerous rumors that the District Attorney’s probe would reveal a “major scandal” in connection with the awarding of contracts.

The grand-jury investigation, billed as United States v. Silverman and others, opened on 6 February, with Woodring being the first to testify. In the next three weeks nearly forty witnesses—including Frederick H. Payne, Assistant Secretary of War under President Hoover; Chief of Staff MacArthur; Maj. Gen. Hugh A. Drum, the Assistant Chief of Staff; Ralph T. O’Neil, a former National Commander of the American Legion; and representatives from a number of firms that manufactured automobiles and aircraft—testified in regard to an “alleged conspiracy to defraud the War De-
partment.” Although the inquiry started as an examination into the manner in which contracts for motor vehicles had been awarded, it quickly turned to charges that civilian lobbyists were selling their services to industrial firms on the grounds that they could influence the awarding of Army contracts. Inquiry was also made into the way in which surplus Army property was being disposed of. Since each of the areas under scrutiny was Woodring’s responsibility, it is not surprising that his personal integrity soon became the object of much speculation, and in most cases the implication was that he personally was involved in some form of graft. Since the testimony before the grand jury was secret, there was room for a great deal of guessing about what was being revealed and what the consequence would be.88

The probe was only a few days old when Woodring became “a real storm center in the nation’s capital,” and rumors abounded that he was on his way out.89 At the same time, newspapers carried stories that Woodring was not getting along well with Secretary Dern or with General MacArthur. Washington columnists Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, whose syndicated column “Washington Merry-Go-Round” appeared in more than 250 daily newspapers, claimed that MacArthur was actively trying to force the Assistant Secretary out of the War Department.40 The New York Daily News did not directly accuse Woodring of any wrongdoing, but it might as well have done so, for it told of the contract controversy and then called Kansas the “center of a group of PWA fund chiseling politicians.”41 The one thing common to nearly all the early stories on the grand-jury investigation was the implication that Woodring was engaged in some wrongdoing. At this point, Harry Woodring’s future did not look too promising. Although annoyed by what he called “unfair criticism and insinuations made against me,” Woodring made no public statements concerning his guilt or innocence.42 Privately, though, he expressed his firm conviction that when the “investigations of the War Department activities now underway are completed, my actions and efforts will be fully justified.”43

As the grand-jury investigation progressed, the story of the alleged conspiracy unfolded. The central figure was Joseph H. Silverman, Jr., a New York exporter who for many years had been buying army surplus supplies, primarily clothing, and selling them abroad. Because of his frequent contact with the War Department, Silverman eventually came to be on good terms with many of its top officials. When Woodring moved into his new apartment at the Mayflower Hotel in 1933, his neighbor happened to be Silverman. Since they were neighbors and came into frequent contact with each other by virtue of their positions, the two men naturally came to be on friendly terms and were frequently seen with each other. The relationship was further strengthened when the surplus dealer secured the legal services of Ralph
T. ("Dyke") O'Neil, a Topeka attorney who was a long-time friend of Woodring's and was past National Commander of the American Legion.\textsuperscript{44}

In late 1933 Silverman and several of his close associates supposedly began to use both their acquaintanceship with Woodring and O'Neil's long-time friendship with him as ploys in an "influence peddling" scheme. The Silverman interests approached several automobile and aviation firms and offered to represent them at the War Department. For a rather large retainer fee and a 15 percent kickback on the business obtained, they promised to use their "inside influence" to see that their clients received favorable contracts. This would supposedly be accomplished by securing changes in specifications that would assure acceptance of their bid. The impression given to the firms that were approached was that Silverman and O'Neil would be able to use their influence with the Assistant Secretary in order to get the necessary changes in contracts.\textsuperscript{45} Of this plan O'Neil had no knowledge.

In preparing his case for the grand jury, District Attorney Leslie C. Garnett discovered that Woodring had previously changed some specifications for motor vehicles; therefore, he wished to ascertain if the changes had been made to give advantage to certain contractors. In testifying before the grand jury, the Assistant Secretary denied, as did O'Neil, any knowledge of the Silverman scheme, but he did admit that he had made a change on the specifications of Army trucks to be purchased under the PWA motorization grant. That change, he explained, which substituted a "full force lubrication system" for the more dated "splash system," was made in order to assure that the contracts would be let on a competitive basis—a practice that had not previously been followed, even though a law requiring "competitive bidding" had been on the books since 1926. In justifying the contract changes, Woodring pointed out that during the Hoover administration 80 percent of the trucks bought by the Army had been purchased from the Chevrolet Motor Company, because Chevrolet was the only truck manufacturer using the splash lubrication system called for in the Army's specifications. Since it was the only company to bid for the trucks, it had always received the contract. A desire to get the most up-to-date lubrication system for Army vehicles, and at the same time to obey the law, had led Woodring to make the change in specifications. Such action enabled a number of new firms to bid on the trucks, and when Chevrolet, which had enjoyed a virtual monopoly for years, lost the contract, it pointed to Woodring and cried conspiracy. Its complaints set in motion the investigation into the Army's contracting procedures.\textsuperscript{46}

After hearing testimony on the Silverman scheme and the letting of contracts, the grand jury turned to the question of disposal of surplus mate-
rials. This segment of the investigation revealed that shortly after Woodring assumed the War Department post he had agreed to continue the policy of his predecessor that had prohibited the Army from repurchasing supplies that it had previously sold as surplus. In order to implement this policy, the War Department’s contracts for sales of surplus materials contained a clause prohibiting the buyer from selling the items in the United States. In July 1933 Woodring, faced with the problem of clothing more than three hundred thousand CCC workers, suspended for one year the “no repurchase” provision as applied to underwear, so that he could repurchase the sorely needed items from Joseph Silverman. While the repurchase price for the seven hundred thousand sets of underwear was nearly double what Silverman had originally paid for them, it was still $750,000 less than the items would have cost had they been purchased new. Woodring, who appeared before the grand jury on three separate occasions, openly admitted that his change in policy had enabled the New York surplus dealer to make a handsome profit, but he justified his action primarily on the grounds that it had saved American taxpayers three-quarters of a million dollars.

While the inquiry into disposal of surplus materials did not indicate any legal wrongdoing on Woodring’s part, it did reveal several instances of poor judgment. Shortly after he came to office in early 1933, Woodring had declared large numbers of blankets, shoes, and underwear as surplus and had ordered that they be disposed of. Although several military advisers warned that such declarations were seriously reducing reserve stocks that the Army might ultimately need, Woodring failed to heed their advice. With the rapid growth of the CCC in mid 1933, many of the disposed-of items were in short supply—a situation for which the Assistant Secretary was rightfully criticized. In another instance he made arrangements to swap army saddles and bridles for the sorely needed underwear that Silverman had; however, that deal had been halted by Chief of Staff MacArthur, who claimed that the horse gear was just as essential to the Army as was the underclothing.

On 26 and 27 February the grand jury heard Woodring as the final witness, and then it began to deliberate over the testimony. For the next two weeks the newspapers speculated about the number of indictments that would be returned. On the morning of 12 March, District Attorney Garnett indicated that a decision was near and that he was confident that at least three persons would be indicted. Later that day, however, Garnett received a jolt when the jurists voted 15-to-8 against returning any indictments. That Woodring may have shown some poor judgment in disposing of certain property and that certain lobbyists had shown indiscretions in some of their dealings were
of no real consequence to the jury, for no individual involved in the contract controversy had engaged in any sort of illegal activity.

When news of the grand jury's action reached an obviously happy but somewhat subdued Woodring, he indicated that he was "exceedingly gratified" but not surprised by the findings. He then broke his long period of official silence by issuing a prepared statement denying reports that there was any conflict between himself and Secretary Dern or General MacArthur and indicating that, as the chief procurement officer for the Army, he had merely carried out his responsibilities in accordance with the law. He closed by indicating that in the future he would, "in spite of complaints, insinuations and sniping by special selfish interests," continue to safeguard the American taxpayer. Secretary Dern was especially pleased with the jury's decision, hailing it as "a complete vindication of the war department." That evening, scores of Woodring's friends called on him to offer their congratulations on the turn of events, but he did not feel much like celebrating. Even though he had just weathered one investigation, he was currently the central figure in another: a congressional inquiry into the awarding of aircraft contracts.

In early 1934 Congress, caught up in an unprecedented "investigation mania," thoroughly examined dozens of governmental agencies and their activities. The War Department was caught in this onslaught as more than a score of investigating bodies probed into such activities as appropriations, air-mail operations, the status of the Air Corps, alleged profits of the munitions industry, and procurement practices. This last inquiry was the one that most directly involved Assistant Secretary Woodring. Although the investigation was technically undertaken by the House Military Affairs Committee, chaired by Congressman John J. McSwain of South Carolina, the actual work was done by the Rogers Committee, the eight-man Subcommittee on Aviation headed by Congressman William N. Rogers of New Hampshire. On 9 February 1934, three days after the grand-jury investigation of the War Department opened, the Rogers Committee began secret hearings to determine how the Army intended to spend the $7.5 million PWA aircraft grant. In the days that followed, testimony by Woodring; Maj. Gen. Benjamin D. Foulois, Chief of the Air Corps; Brig. Gen. Oscar Westover, Assistant Chief of the Air Corps; Brig. Gen. Henry C. Pratt, Chief of the Material Division; and other military officials revealed that between 1926—when the Aircraft Procurement Act went into effect—and 1933 more than 92 percent of all Army aircraft had been secured by "negotiated bids" rather than by "competitive bids." Under the negotiated-contract system the Air Corps tested any plane made available to it by a manufacturer. If it felt that the craft was satisfactory, it would then negotiate a contract with the
producer for the number of aircraft desired. This procedure meant that a handful of top Air Corps officials, especially the Chief of the Air Corps, could and in fact did decide which company or companies received aircraft contracts—a condition looked upon quite favorably by Air Corps leaders and by the manufacturers who received the negotiated contracts.51

All went well until late 1933, when Assistant Secretary Woodring decided to implement the section of the Procurement Act requiring that military airplanes be purchased by competitive bidding. Under the new system the Army would seek bids for a plane meeting certain minimum performance requirements. After service tests a contract would be given to the lowest bidder whose craft met the announced standards. Such a move was vigorously opposed by most Air Corps officials, who contended that the new system would not provide as good a plane as did the old system. They argued that in order to get more than one bid on a particular aircraft, it would be necessary to lower the specification requirements, thereby giving the Army an inferior plane to what it could have if it was permitted to secure what it considered to be the best plane regardless of cost.52 In spite of pressures from within the War Department, Woodring, in December 1933, threw open to competitive bidding the planes that were to be purchased with the $7.5 million PWA grant.53

That the disgruntled military men had considerable influence on Capitol Hill became evident to Woodring on 9 February 1934, when he appeared before the Rogers Committee. At that time Congressmen W. Frank James of Michigan and Paul J. Kvale of Minnesota attacked Woodring, asking whether or not he had lowered the performance requirements of new airplanes in order to broaden the competition. Congressman James expressed alarm over reports reaching him that although the performance requirements for a recently advertised military aircraft had originally left the office of Chief of the Air Corps Foulois calling for a minimum speed of 235 miles per hour, a cruising range of 500 miles, and a ceiling of 27,800 feet, when the bids went out of the War Department, they called for a minimum speed of 176 miles per hour, a range of 400 miles, and an 18,700-foot ceiling. “What I am anxious to know,” said James. “is whether the Chief of Air Corps’ recommendations were changed by the General Staff, your office, or anyone else.” “Absolutely not,” replied Woodring, who went on to explain that the only change that he had made was to provide for competitive bidding; he had not changed any specifications. Congressman Kvale then voiced support for negotiated bidding and expressed his fear that the policy instituted by Woodring would result in the procurement of slower and inferior aircraft for the Air Corps.54

With the question of changes in specifications still unanswered, the
Rogers Committee turned its attention to charges that aircraft firms were making extravagant profits on the sale of military airplanes. On this issue, Woodring came to the defense of the Army and the manufacturers by showing that while the average profit from 1926 through 1933 had been 19.8 percent, the figure had dropped to 8.9 percent in the past three years. The latter figure seemed quite reasonable to Woodring, but to several of the Congressmen it seemed quite high.

The secret hearings of the Subcommittee on Aviation in early February actually raised more questions than they answered, thus casting a shadow of suspicion over the Army's procurement system and its chief administrator, Harry Woodring. Subsequently, on 27 February, John McSwain, Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, who was upset because his subcommittee's efforts to investigate procurement practices were being frustrated by "evasions" on the part of certain witnesses, introduced a resolution calling for a full-scale inquiry into "charges of profiteering and irregularities involving the expenditure of public funds for national defense." Three days later the House passed the measure that gave the Rogers Subcommittee $10,000 for expenses, authority to subpoena witnesses, and the power to force private businesses and governmental agencies to make their books and records available to members of the committee.

On 7 March the Rogers group, with its greatly expanded investigative powers, launched a full-scale probe of the procurement practices of the Army. As its leadoff witness it called Harry Woodring. The first topic that the committee considered was a recently released transcript of the 1935 Army appropriations hearings, which contained a statement by General Foulois indicating that specifications for airplanes to be purchased with PWA funds had been "changed in the office of the assistant secretary of war." When asked about this, Woodring acknowledged, as he had several weeks before, that he had had difficulties with Foulois and other War Department officials in instituting the new bidding system, but he strongly denied making any changes. To clarify the matter, the committee immediately sent for Foulois, who denied making the alleged statement and then hedged by stating that if he had said it, he had not meant it. What Foulois left unsaid was that in order to carry out the program of competitive bidding that was demanded of his office, he had to reduce the specification requirements.

After Foulois had finished, Woodring returned to explain exactly how his newly instituted policy worked. First, the War Department publicly advertised for bids for planes with certain specifications and performance capabilities. Companies were then given eight to twelve months to develop such a craft. Any American firm could enter the competition, the only requirement being that its bid had to be accompanied by a sample airplane.
that had been completed and was ready to fly. After extensive tests by the Air Corps to determine whether the plane could meet the requirements, the bids would be opened, and the company with the lowest per-unit offer would receive the contract. To those committee members who expressed a fear that such a policy would prevent the purchase of more efficient craft which would usually cost more, Woodring explained that the solution to that problem would be to raise performance requirements rather than to eliminate competitive bidding.59

In the days that followed Woodring’s testimony, Foulois, MacArthur, and other War Department personnel revealed that Woodring had almost single-handedly instituted competitive bidding for aircraft and motor vehicles and that he was in the process of extending the policy to nearly all Army purchases. The members of the committee were favorably impressed by the smooth-talking Assistant Secretary, and on 17 March they indicated their belief that he was “above reproach in handling airplane bids.”60 That good news, which came just five days after the grand-jury “vindication,” was followed by more of the same in early May, when the Rogers Committee adopted a report that praised Woodring for his successful attempt to institute competitive bidding for airplanes. It further maintained that while the Assistant Secretary’s actions were “required and fully justified,” the actions of General Foulois were “in clear violation of existing law.”61 This favorable report did much to offset the earlier bad publicity that Woodring had received. As far as he was concerned, the procurement controversy was over, and he had fared quite well. Both the grand-jury and the congressional investigations started by casting doubts upon his administrative ability and his integrity; yet, they terminated by not only vindicating him but also by convincing the public, Congress, and the President that he was an able and honest public official whose procurement policy benefited both the Army and the taxpayer.

In the latter half of 1934 Woodring further improved the aircraft-procurement policy by providing an evaluation method that placed a “premium upon improvement in performance.” This meant that each plane tested by the Air Corps would be awarded bonus points on the basis of a pretermined method of evaluation that was known to the bidder beforehand; ultimately the contract would go to the manufacturer who produced the plane with the highest evaluation. This change, which rewarded performance above the minimum requirements, served as a major incentive for firms to produce aircraft of the finest quality possible. In addition to upgrading the quality of the aircraft, the policy also served as a stimulus to the nation’s aircraft industry, in that any company that could produce a plane realized that it now had a chance to win a contract; it was no longer a question of
having to know the right people. The subsequent increase in the number of aircraft firms after 1935 was to be of incalculable value in the early days of World War II, for they were to carry the production burden until new facilities could be provided.

By the late 1930s competitive bidding was being used in the procurement of trucks, tanks, small arms, electronic equipment, and hundreds of other military items. The impact of competitive bidding on each of those products was the same as on aircraft: higher quality, lower cost, and more producers. There can be little doubt that Woodring’s policy was successful, for it has continued to serve as the basis for Army procurement right down to the present. That the United States Army had such fine equipment to fight with in Europe, the Pacific, Korea, and Vietnam was in no small measure due to the efforts of Harry Woodring.

Although he devoted considerable time and energy to procurement matters, they did not constitute the only area of activity or accomplishment for Woodring. As Assistant Secretary of War, he played a key role in the development of the Air Corps. His close connection with that branch of the Army began on 7 June 1933, when President Roosevelt, as part of an economy move, abolished the post of Assistant Secretary of War for Air and transferred its duties to the Assistant Secretary. Woodring gladly accepted his new responsibilities and then worked ceaselessly to develop air strength. His air-mindedness was quite evident. He loved to travel by air, and his frequent use of military aircraft to go to and from speaking engagements was looked upon with satisfaction by those military men who saw bigger things ahead for air power. Through extensive reading and by continually asking questions, Woodring soon gained an extensive knowledge of aircraft and aeronautics. On one occasion the somewhat surprised J. E. Schaefer, head of the Stearman Aircraft Company, commended Woodring on his "remarkably clear understanding of the technical details incident to aircraft development and aircraft procurement."

It was in his first year at the War Department that the somewhat reluctant Woodring approved the developmental order for an experimental four-engine bomber, which came to be known as the B-17, or Flying Fortress. Woodring later recalled the event:

Back early in 1933 I had only been sitting for a short time as Asst. Sec’y of War and in walked Gen’l Foullois, Col. Conger Pratt . . . and two or three others—all in to my office and laid down some very extensive blue prints and with much conversation and finesse in explaining—covering the first development order for my signature on a four-motored fortress. The order called for the expenditure of millions in the final development—an experiment they assured me—well I was scared to death to

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sign. But after several days of talk—and several private consultations
with Conger Pratt—in whom I had much confidence as to Air Corps
matters—I nervously signed.68

Approval of the B-17 experimental order was about the only real contact
that Woodring was to have with that aircraft as Assistant Secretary, but, as
will be seen, it was to present him with numerous problems after he became
Secretary of War.

Woodring was interested in the quantity, as well as the quality, of aircraft; thus, in 1934 he, General MacArthur, and General Foulois directed
the formulation of plans for a 2,300-plane “Army Air Service ‘second to none
in quality of planes, pilots and morale.’ ”69 Unfortunately, Congress would
not go along with the plan, and authorized air strength remained at 1,800
planes. During the next two years, however, he continued to drum up sup­
port for a larger Air Corps; and in 1936 he took his case to Congress, where
he argued that the number of planes should be increased to 4,000, because
“should an emergency arise, this number would undoubtedly be needed.”
“It is believed, therefore,” he continued, “that the interests of national de­
fense, as well as those of national economy, warrant the upper limit in the
number of airplanes being left somewhat flexible rather than fixed. How­
ever, . . . the number 4,000 does not seem immoderate.”70 Although Con­
gress did not feel that such a large force was needed, it did increase the
strength from 1,800 to 2,320 planes. The Army and Navy Journal
recognized Woodring’s role in the expansion by noting that he was “actively helping to
put wings on the Army.”71

As Assistant Secretary of War, Woodring also had a hand in establishing
the General Headquarters Air Force (GHQAF), the first real step toward
the establishment of an independent Air Corps. Calls for an Air Force
separate from the Army went back to the days of World War I, but oppo­
sition from within Congress and the military establishment blocked such
action; therefore, until well into the 1930s, Air Corps personnel and aircraft
were under the control of the area commanders of the Army Corps. Cries
for more autonomy for the Air Corps swelled when the 1934 “Air-Mail
Fiasco” brought home to Congress and the entire nation the need for re­
organization, better aircraft, and more thorough training.72 The President
agreed that the first step in upgrading the Air Corps was reorganization, so
on 1 March 1935 the GHQAF was established. The GHQAF, which was
commanded by Brig. Gen. Frank W. Andrews and was directly responsible
to the General Staff, had under its control all tactical air-combat units and
thus could be trained and commanded as a homogeneous force “capable of
operating in cooperation with the ground forces in battle or on independent
aviation missions.”73
The air arm of the Army now had an independence and a unity that it had lacked heretofore. While a completely independent Air Force was still more than a decade away, the first big step toward that end had been taken. Woodring had enthusiastically supported the new concept, and he and General MacArthur were instrumental in working out many of the details of the new organization. This was the last major project that the two men were to work on, however, because on 1 September 1935 MacArthur stepped down as Chief of Staff and was replaced by Gen. Malin Craig. Woodring and MacArthur had worked well together and had developed a great respect and admiration for one another.

Harry Woodring was proud of the role that he had played as Assistant Secretary of War in the growth and development of army air power, and he had every right to be so. His contributions in aircraft procurement methods, in the development of the B-17, in increasing the air strength, in the creation and organization of GHQAF, and in serving as a spokesman for air power—all served to mark him as a true friend of the Air Corps. Yet, as will be seen, this man, as Secretary of War, was to be frequently and bitterly denounced as being anti-Air Force.

During the years that Woodring filled the number two spot at the War Department, another of his primary responsibilities was to serve as a public-relations man for the Army. In this capacity he traveled throughout the country, delivering scores of speeches to veterans organizations, patriotic groups, and any other gathering that was interested in the Army or in national defense. In these addresses, in which he told what the military was doing, what it planned to do, and what it needed to do, he nearly always focused on one or the other of his two favorite themes: preparedness and patriotism. He maintained that the best way to avoid war was for the United States to be so strong militarily that no nation would dare attack it. As the 1930s rolled on and the power of Hitler and Mussolini grew, and as more nations throughout the world came under arms, Woodring placed even more emphasis on adequate national defense as the best way to avoid a foreign war.

As Europe rearmed, there began to appear throughout the United States numerous antiwar societies which advocated drastic reductions of armaments. Some members of these groups went so far as to pledge that if the country became involved in war, they would refuse to bear arms. Woodring became one of the most outspoken opponents of such groups. Crying out against the threats of "radical organizations" and the "enemy boring from within," he warned Americans that they could not "stand by and watch our great country stripped of its means of defense, ready to be sacrificed on the altar of aggression." When the National Peace Conference, a gathering of
thirty-five antiwar societies, met in Washington in 1936, Woodring did not
keep silent. He denounced the motives for the conference, and he questioned
the loyalty of its participants by saying, "Defense of one's country is the first
essential of true patriotism." Such statements were welcomed by conservative
groups like the American Legion, but they were bitterly attacked by extreme
liberals. The Nation, which billed itself as "The leading Liberal Weekly
since 1865," called the Woodring attacks "a fascist assault on virtually all the
church, labor, pacifist and student groups of the nation." Such criticism
did not bother the Assistant Secretary; it only made him more vehement in
his condemnation of those "subversive influences opposing adequate military
and naval preparedness." Run-ins with various antiwar groups kept Wood­
ring in the news in 1934 and 1935, but they did not place him at the center
of any real controversy as the CCC article and procurement investigations
had done.

The years that Woodring served as Assistant Secretary of War were
especially good ones as far as his personal life was concerned. His marriage
to Helen was a most happy one, providing him with a contentment that he
had never known. To the happiness of marriage were soon added the joys
of fatherhood, with the birth of a son, Marcus Coolidge, on 19 June 1934,
followed by that of a daughter, Melissa, on 21 June 1935, and another son,
Cooper Coolidge, on 10 February 1937. There was no prouder father in all
of Washington, and in the years that followed, Woodring always found time
in his busy schedule for his family. The year of Melissa's birth saw the
family move to His Lordship's Kindness, a sprawling two-story brick man­
sion in Prince George County, Maryland; and the next year saw them taking
up residence at Woodlawn, a spacious estate near Mount Vernon. These
beautiful homes and their surrounding gave Woodring an adequate oppor­
tunity to engage in his favorite pastimes: gardening and collecting antiques.

Whereas late 1934 and 1935 were relatively quiet, routine, and noncontro­
versial so far as Woodring's activities in the War Department were con­
cerned, the situation changed in early 1936, when he became involved in a
dispute over the removal of Maj. Gen. Johnson Hagood. The difficulties
began in December 1935, when the General, who had a reputation for saying
exactly what he thought, was called before a House Appropriations sub­
committee to testify about certain War Department appropriations. At that
time the subcommittee chairman, Thomas L. Blanton of Texas, assured
Hagood that anything he would say would be kept secret. In the candid dis­
cussion that followed, the General made several flippant remarks about the
WPA, one of FDR's most notable work-relief programs. Speaking of the
previous year, Hagood said, “I got a lot of stage money from the WPA. I call it stage money because you can pass it around but you cannot get anything out of it in the end.” Two months later, on 10 February 1936, the “secret” hearings were released to the press, and Hagood’s charges of “stage money” appeared in headlines across the country—a situation that proved quite embarrassing to Hagood and to the Roosevelt administration.81

Two weeks after Hagood’s testimony was made public he was relieved as Commander of the Eighth Corps Area, and he was ordered to proceed from his base at San Antonio to his home in South Carolina “to await orders.” Just where the Hagood removal order originated was not then, and still is not, clear; however, there was no doubt in the mind of Congressman Blanton that Assistant Secretary of War Woodring was the man most responsible for the “damnable, infamous, dirty and inexcusable” outrage.82 In a fit of anger, Congressman Blanton took the floor of the House and called for the impeachment of Woodring, Secretary of War Dern, and Chief of Staff Craig; but it was the Assistant Secretary, “the man who has attempted to spank a great major general,” that he castigated most vehemently. In the course of his tirade Blanton warned: “Harry Woodring, you are not going to get away with it! You have started something that you are not going to carry through, because I am going to give you the scrap of your life.” He then ended with a threat: “Harry Woodring, . . . you had better withdraw this damnable, unjust order to Johnson Hagood, because I am after you.”83

In spite of a strong desire to strike back at Blanton, Woodring maintained his composure and remained silent. This uncharacteristic action in all likelihood stemmed from a request by President Roosevelt that Woodring refrain from saying or doing anything that would further stir things up. Both the administration and the War Department had hoped that the Hagood affair would fade away, but such was not to be the case, as Congressman Blanton and Senator James Byrnes of South Carolina continued to press for withdrawal of the removal order. Finally, in late March, the President, mindful that it was an election year, moved to end the controversy. He personally met with Hagood on 22 March and 11 April, and after the second meeting he announced that he was restoring Hagood to active duty as Commander of the Sixth Corps Area.84 With Hagood and his supporters interpreting this action as a vindication, the dispute vanished as quickly as it had appeared, and Harry Woodring gave a sigh of relief. The Assistant Secretary had successfully weathered this controversy just as he had the ones over the CCC article, the grand-jury investigation, the Rogers Committee inquiry, and the encounters with various antiwar groups. Those experiences were extremely valuable to Woodring, because they helped teach him to face,
accept, and cope with the kinds of problems, pressures, and criticisms that he would later encounter in an even more crucial government post.

During the years that Harry Woodring served as Assistant Secretary of War, he was involved in a number of controversies that made enemies for him among Congressmen, cabinet officials, churchmen, educators, antiwar leaders, and liberal journalists; however, he had also succeeded in projecting a favorable image to many people in Washington and throughout the country. He impressed many Congressmen as being a young, energetic, and forceful man who had done a masterful job of instituting a competitive purchasing system in the Army. He also won the confidence of many individuals in the War Department; among professional military men he was generally liked and respected. Both Chief of Staff MacArthur and his successor, General Craig, thought very highly of Woodring and developed a very close relationship with him. President Roosevelt, although embarrassed by some of the Assistant Secretary's verbal blunders, still had confidence in him, because the former Kansas Governor had proved to be a very able administrator who could carry out his responsibilities efficiently. Woodring had also won support among members of such powerful organizations as the American Legion, Daughters of the American Revolution, the Reserve Officers Association, and other patriotically oriented groups that looked with favor upon his speeches on preparedness and patriotism.

In the summer of 1936 Harry Woodring could look over the previous forty-nine years with real pride: he had come a long way from Elk City. His success as a banker, Governor, and “Little Cabinet” member revealed that he was a man of administrative ability and political skill. Experience had prepared him for bigger and better things, and all he needed now was the opportunity. That opportunity was just around the corner.