Throughout its history, both in peace and in war, the United States has been a nation firmly committed to the principle of civilian control of the military. This tenet stems from the belief that “in a democracy all basic policy, including military policy, is made by officials responsible to the people with whom sovereignty ultimately rests.” While this principle has held true since colonial times, the American attitude toward the military establishment has continually fluctuated. During periods of war the American people have tended to look upon the military with trust, respect, and appreciation; however, in times of peace a fear of military usurpation and tyranny has caused them to look upon the Army with suspicion and distrust. The widespread fear of the militarization of American society has created an “antimilitary tradition.” The public attitude toward the American military establishment has therefore generally been one of admiration and support in time of war, and one of scorn and apprehension in time of peace.

The United States Army has always been expected to provide the nation with adequate security against hostile forces but, at the same time, not be so strong as to present a threat to the society that created it. Such attitudes have placed the American military man in a difficult position, for while his fellow countrymen expect him to defend and, if necessary, die for his country, they also consider him a potential threat to their cherished ideal of civilian control of the government. Out of all this has emerged a widespread belief that the military establishment is a necessary evil. Fear and distrust
of American military leaders have caused them to be isolated from other
elements of society, so that they have become "a conscious and coherent
group within but largely apart from the larger governmental structure. Such
a group . . . has its own distinctive entrance and tenure procedures, its own
salary system, its own traditions and group attitudes, its own sensitivity and
code of privacy." Because of their isolation, military leaders have rarely
taken an interest in public affairs and have usually found it expedient to
avoid expressing opinions on political matters. However, the officers at the
highest echelons have frequently found that they could not avoid becoming
embroiled in politics, because they were working under civilians whose de­
cisions were based to a large extent on political considerations. Accustomed
to a promotion system based on merit and loyalty, and working within an
organization in which the same regulations apply to everyone, the military
men have often found it difficult to understand the ways of their politically
oriented superiors.

As Harry Woodring soon discovered, carrying out the responsibilities of the
Secretary of War was no easy task. The position was a complex and difficult
one, not only because of the magnitude of its functions and responsibilities,
but also because it placed a politically appointed civilian in charge of an
establishment staffed by professional military men. To succeed in the post
it was necessary to please and accommodate a politically elected Commander
in Chief, on the one hand, and the leaders of the military establishment on
the other. As President Roosevelt's representative, Woodring stood for
civilian control of the Army; but since the Secretary of War was responsible
for the military defense of the nation, he had to represent and attempt to
carry out the recommendations of his military advisers. He was in reality a
politician doing a military job. In a nation committed to the idea of civilian
control of the military, it was extremely difficult to represent and please both
those who desired a stronger Army and those who feared the increased in­
fluence of the military. In an attempt to please both the civilian and the
military, Woodring was forced to walk on the fence that divided the two.
To fall or even lean too far to one side always brought the wrath of the
other. When he urged Congress and the President to strengthen the nation's
Army, he was called a militarist or a warmonger; and when he called for
less than the General Staff recommended, military men criticized him for
failing to provide an adequate defense. To satisfy completely his superior
and his subordinates at the same time was an extremely difficult, if not an
impossible, task.

One consequence of having a politically elected Commander in Chief
and a politically appointed Secretary of War is that politics comes to play a key role in the decisions, policies, and actions of the War Department. Both President Roosevelt and Secretary Woodring realized that they had the responsibility of providing an adequate military defense, but they also realized that in pursuing that end, they must not do anything to antagonize or frighten Congress or the public, without whose support nothing could be accomplished. In running the War Department, Secretary Woodring had to deal extensively with the President, Congress, the cabinet, and the General Staff. Since the first three of these were politically oriented, it was not surprising that politics came to have a major influence on Woodring’s operation of the War Department and eventually came to disrupt its activities. To understand the effects of politics on Secretary Woodring and the War Department, it is necessary to examine his relationships with President Roosevelt, his military advisers, Congress, the Assistant Secretary of War, and those individuals who made up Roosevelt’s inner circle of friends.

The personal relationship between Harry Woodring and Franklin D. Roosevelt was an extremely close one from the time they first met in 1931 until the latter’s death in 1945. Woodring had the highest respect and admiration for FDR, and he did not hesitate to say so both publicly and privately. Roosevelt was very fond of Woodring, and treasured his friendship. The fact that Woodring was to remain Secretary of War as long as he did was in large part due to his close personal relationship with the President. But while they were always on the best of terms personally, Roosevelt and Woodring were frequently at odds over official matters. Disagreements usually stemmed from the fact that although Woodring was nominally Secretary of War, President Roosevelt always wanted to be, and to a great extent was, his own Secretary of War. The President accomplished this by personal intervention and by delegating tasks to his own personal representatives who were outside of the chain of command. According to Roosevelt’s friend Edward J. Flynn, a Democratic leader, “The Boss either appoints four men to do the job of one or one man to do the job of four.” He then added that none of the four would know what the others were doing nor would the one man know “the scope of his authority.” The New York Herald Tribune expressed it more succinctly when it said, “The role of a true executive, functioning through able subordinates possessing both power and responsibility, has never appealed to him [Roosevelt].”

President Roosevelt’s desire to run his own show frequently caused difficulty in the War Department, because the Secretary “had his own ideas and he worked hard at putting them through.” Woodring was always willing to listen to the other side of an issue, but once he came to a conclusion as to which policy, principle, or line of action to follow, he stuck to
it with the utmost tenacity. He liked to tell others what to do, but he was often resentful of another's telling him what to do, even if that other person happened to be his boss, the President of the United States. When he and Roosevelt disagreed on a matter, Woodring would use all his knowledge and oratorical skill to win Roosevelt over; and if the decision was not what Woodring felt it should be, he would often delay in carrying out the President's wishes.

As time passed and Europe headed closer to war, their disagreements over important policies became more frequent, and Roosevelt, in spite of his high personal regard for Woodring, began to consider replacing him. The President, however, was not willing simply to dismiss his Secretary of War; he wished to ease him out of the War Department by offering him another lucrative position. When their disagreements over official matters got to the place where they irritated the President, he began to ignore Woodring, turning to others, both within and outside the War Department. Even when FDR was ignoring Woodring as Secretary of War, he continued to maintain a close personal relationship with him. Although the two men frequently clashed over governmental policies, they never let such disputes interfere with their admiration, respect, and fondness for one another.

Harmonious as Woodring's personal associations with his superior were, his relationships with his military advisers were even better. The close association between Woodring and Chief of Staff Craig was well known; on numerous occasions it was the topic of editorials and news stories. General Craig had a great respect for Woodring, going so far as to say that during the period that he, Craig, was Chief of Staff, Woodring had not "made a single mistake as Secretary." Woodring's relations with Craig's successor, Gen. George C. Marshall, were also very amiable. The General Staff and the heads of the several Service Branches and Combat Arms, as well as the members of their staffs, appear to have felt that Woodring understood their problems and based his decisions on a sincere desire to do what was best for the Army. Another factor that endeared the Secretary to the military leaders was his policy of not interfering in what he considered to be strictly military matters. According to the Army and Navy Journal, "Woodring's relations with the military portions of his department have been marked with great consideration and sympathetic understanding. Between him and General Craig . . . there has existed a most cordial relationship and effective cooperation for the good of the military service." Perhaps the best expression of Woodring's relationship with the military appeared in a Kansas City Star editorial written after he had been forced from the cabinet: "He had strong support from the military men, who found in the secretary an able business executive, and an open-minded, intelligent and fair department head."
Plenty of testimony to this effect has come from high military sources. The relationship between Woodring and his top military advisers was definitely one of mutual respect and admiration.

In the late thirties, as the threat of Hitler grew larger and larger, the United States turned increasingly to the question of national defense. When this began to happen, Woodring found his relationship with Congress becoming increasingly important. He spent hundreds of hours before the House and Senate Military Affairs committees, made numerous appearances before the War Department Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations, and wrote scores of letters to congressional committees and individual Congressmen, informing them of the Army's needs. He frequently recommended legislation to overcome certain shortcomings, then did all that he could to convince Congress to provide the authorization and the necessary appropriations. In his appearances before the committees, the calm, smooth-talking Secretary usually impressed his listeners with his extensive knowledge of the Army, the Air Corps, the War Department, and national defense.

After war broke out in Europe in the fall of 1939, Woodring adopted a policy of "direct dealing" with the congressional leaders who were responsible for Army authorizations and appropriations. This policy, which consisted of monthly conferences between War Department officials and key House and Senate committeemen, was initiated because Woodring wished "to maintain closer contact between the Department and Congress." At these meetings, Woodring and his military advisers explained what was needed, what was being done, and what the Congress could and should do to assist the Army. One of the major consequences of these meetings was the appearance of a close rapport between Woodring and key members of Congress. This relationship frequently paid big dividends to the Army, such as it did in early 1939 when Woodring gave the Congressmen a chance to observe the highly secret work in radar that the Army was undertaking at the Signal Corps Laboratories at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey; and they responded by providing an additional but unexplained $150,000, which was used for radar research.

Secretary Woodring was highly regarded and respected by a number of important members of the House and the Senate Military Affairs committees. In the House committee, Chairman Andrew J. May, Dow Harter, John Sparkman, and Charles I. Faddis thought very highly of Woodring and were among his most loyal supporters. Faddis, one of the most influential members of the committee, was later to say of Woodring, "He was of the utmost assistance to us in our efforts to bring our military affairs up to date." In the Senate Military Affairs Committee, numerous individuals,
both Democrats and Republicans, voiced their confidence in Secretary Woodring. In the fall of 1939 Senator Robert Reynolds of North Carolina told his fellow committeemen, “I have a good deal of confidence in the Secretary, and want the benefit of his advice.” At about the same time Senator Josh Lee of Oklahoma, in a committee hearing at which Woodring was testifying, said: “I desire to compliment the present Secretary of War for what he has done in increasing our defense, which I think is due in large part to his efforts.” Republican Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, who, as a member of the Military Affairs Committee and the War Department Subcommittee on Appropriations, had considerable opportunity to see Woodring in action, stated on the Senate floor that he found the Secretary “to be an able, capable, conscientious executive and member of the Cabinet.” Other important members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee who had confidence in Woodring and considered him to be a strong Secretary of War were Senators Edwin Johnson of Colorado, Lister Hill of Alabama, Bennett Clark of Missouri, and Gerald Nye of North Dakota. The *Army and Navy Journal* summed up Woodring’s relationship with the legislative branch by saying, “He has so conducted himself with Congress that he has had little difficulty getting his recommendations adopted.”

That Woodring enjoyed a fine relationship with Congress, especially with the more conservative members whose views he best reflected, was evident in a number of ways. First, his recommendations concerning legislation were usually accepted and acted upon. Second, although the discussions in the committee hearings often became heated on both sides, Woodring was never treated in a rude or disrespectful manner. Third, while numerous Congressmen praised him publicly and privately for the job that he was doing, they rarely criticized him. It is doubtful that Woodring could have enjoyed a better working relationship with Congress than he did. This was not to say, however, that he always got what he wanted from Congress. In fact, when it came to appropriations, his meager requests for the War Department were usually slashed even further by the Bureau of the Budget and the Congress, both of whom were heavily influenced by the strong isolationist and antimilitary attitudes of the thirties.

From an examination of Secretary Woodring’s personal relationship with President Roosevelt, his associations with military leaders, and his dealings with Congress, one might suppose that he experienced a minimum of political difficulties in running the War Department. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the feuds that Woodring had with his Assistant Secretary, Louis A. Johnson, and a few members of Roosevelt’s “inner circle” were of such magnitude and caused so much trouble that they more than offset the gains brought about by his smooth relationships with the President,
the military, and Congress. A knowledge and an understanding of Woodring's feuds are of utmost importance in understanding this period. Robert Sherwood, author of *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, put it best when he said, “History will achieve no complete understanding of Franklin Roosevelt's Administration without knowledge of the intramural feuds which so frequently beset it. (I do not believe that even history will ever be able to understand why he tolerated them to the extent that he did.)”

After the confirmation of Woodring as Secretary of War in May 1937, the question arose of who would be appointed to fill the post of Assistant Secretary. The names most frequently mentioned for the position were those of two former National Commanders of the American Legion, Louis A. Johnson and J. Ray Murphy. Both men had hoped to get the position of Secretary, and both were greatly disappointed when it was given to Woodring. Johnson was then offered the job of Assistant Secretary, but he turned it down because he did not wish to be in a position where he was a subordinate to Woodring. Murphy was also offered the position, and he likewise turned it down. The President then began a search for a “strictly businessman” to fill the post.

On 7 June, Roosevelt asked Woodring what he thought of William I. Westervelt, vice-president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, as a possibility for Assistant Secretary. Four days later, Woodring reported back that he would be in favor of the appointment; however, the appointment was never made, because in the meantime Louis Johnson had changed his mind and agreed to accept the position. From the time of his initial refusal, Johnson had been under pressure from James Farley and a few high-ranking American Legion officials to change his mind and accept the number two spot. Johnson was hesitant, but he finally agreed to accept the post; his reason for doing so was based on an alleged promise made to him concerning the secretaryship. A knowledge of that alleged promise is extremely important if one is to understand Johnson's actions once he assumed the office of Assistant Secretary.

According to one version of the story, while Johnson was being pressured to accept the job, James Farley called Senator Matthew M. Neely of West Virginia, a friend of Johnson's, and asked him to urge Johnson to take the job. According to Neely, Farley said, “You can tell Louis I think within three or four months he will be made Secretary if he will take the post.” Neely passed this information on to Johnson, who then made his decision. Whether correctly or not, Johnson interpreted this as a promise from the President that he would soon be promoted to the top spot. Johnson made no
effort to keep the promise a secret, for "almost in the same breath with which
he took office . . . he informed intimates that he had been appointed for the
express purpose of replacing Woodring in a few months."\(^8\)

On numerous occasions Johnson stated that he had been promised the secretaryship. Some­
times he claimed that Roosevelt made the promise, but most of the time he said that Farley had made it on the President's behalf. However, Roosevelt
did not recall such a promise, and Farley denied having made any such pledge.\(^8\) Farley termed Johnson's story "absolutely untrue" and told the
President that if there was any question about it, he should bring Johnson and
himself face to face and ask if such a promise had been made. Roosevelt,
wishing to avoid an embarrassing situation, never brought about the con­
frontation.\(^8\) Whether a promise was actually made is not so important as
the fact that Johnson believed, or at least claimed to believe, that he would
soon be named to replace Woodring as Secretary of War.

Following a cabinet meeting on Friday, 11 June 1937, the President told
Woodring that Johnson had agreed to accept the job of Assistant Secretary,
and he asked if Woodring had any objections. When the Secretary replied
in the negative, the President said that the announcement would be given to
the press.\(^38\) Just whom Woodring supported is unclear, because on the day
of the cabinet meeting, he sent two letters to the President concerning the
appointment. In one he indicated that he considered William Westervelt
"admirably fitted and qualified as to business ability to be Assistant Secretary
of War." In a second letter he stated, "I desire to recommend for your con­
sideration the name of the Honorable Louis A. Johnson . . . for appointment
as Assistant Secretary of War."\(^8\) It is likely that the letter on Johnson was
a mere formality and that it was written after the appointment had been
determined. One reason for believing that is was written after the Roosevelt­
Woodring meeting is that it seems unlikely that Roosevelt, who was his
own boss when it came to appointing key officials, would so readily have
accepted Woodring's recommendation.\(^40\)

In deciding on Johnson, FDR followed his time-tested practice of put­
ting "into the same office or job men who differed from each other in
temperament and viewpoint."\(^41\) Roosevelt knew that when opposites were
placed in the top positions in a department or were put in charge of a major
project, their inability to agree or get along insured that "no single view, no
single man could achieve undue significance or influence."\(^42\) The result was
that major problems could and did end in Roosevelt's lap—exactly where he
wanted them. The cabinet members knew that because Roosevelt felt that
there were benefits to be gained from departmental quarrels, he was not
always anxious to end them.\(^43\) For that reason, Roosevelt gave Ickes and
Hopkins control over public works, gave Ickes and Wallace control over

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conservation and power, placed Sumner Welles in the State Department to offset Cordell Hull, and placed Johnson in the War Department to counterbalance Woodring.\textsuperscript{44}

On 15 June 1937 President Roosevelt sent Johnson's name to the Senate for confirmation. Approval was quickly given, and on 29 June he took office. Johnson had been born and reared in Roanoke, Virginia, but after graduating from the University of Virginia Law School in 1912, he went to Clarksburg, West Virginia, to set up practice. He soon entered politics, and by 1917 he was Democratic floor leader of the West Virginia House of Delegates and was considering running for Governor. During World War I Johnson entered the Army, and after receiving a commission, he served in Europe as a captain in the 80th Infantry Division. After being discharged, he returned to his law practice; he also became an active member of the American Legion and was elected National Commander in 1932. In 1936 the staunch Democrat organized the Veterans Division of the Democratic National Committee, and within a year he was rewarded for his political labors with the post of Assistant Secretary of War.\textsuperscript{45}

Johnson, who was very energetic and ambitious, set out to supplant Woodring, whom he considered unfit to be Secretary of War.\textsuperscript{46} He immediately "set himself to running the War Department, acting very much like a No. 2 man who had been made No. 1 in all but title."\textsuperscript{47} Johnson believed that the procurement and economic-mobilization responsibilities conferred upon the Assistant Secretary of War by the National Defense Act of 1920 made him responsible to the Congress and to the Chief Executive, thus making him entirely independent of the authority of the Secretary of War.\textsuperscript{48} Such an interpretation, along with the assumption that he would soon be elevated to the top spot, led him to feel that he was entitled to direct access to the President on matters concerning his own office. He also began to present defense programs and estimates publicly without even consulting his chief, Secretary Woodring. To the outspoken Johnson the chain of command meant nothing. Shortly after taking office, Johnson started the practice of announcing that on a certain date he was going to be appointed Secretary of War. When the announced day came and nothing happened, he would wait a few weeks or months, then do the same thing again.\textsuperscript{49} According to Woodring, Johnson was soon spending "most of his waking hours in trying to replace me as Secretary of War."\textsuperscript{50}

Predictably, Johnson's attitude and conduct soon created difficulties, and with the passage of time the animosity between him and Woodring grew increasingly bitter. At first the two disagreed only over major matters such as selective service, the importance of heavy bombers, and the strength of the Air Corps. But before long they began to bicker and quibble over less im-
portant things, and then they progressed to the place where they argued over everything, no matter how insignificant. Eventually the feud got to the place where the two men merely ignored each other.51

Evidence of the Woodring-Johnson feud was apparent as early as January 1938. In that month the State Department requested that the Army send six bombers to Buenos Aires, Argentina, on a good-will flight to help that country celebrate the inauguration of its new President. Woodring disapproved of the idea and was prepared to block it. A journalist who wrote for various South American newspapers and who knew the situation in the War Department took the idea to the Assistant Secretary. Johnson liked the idea and took it directly to President Roosevelt, who approved it and instructed Woodring to send the bombers.52 The flight was made, and it received favorable world-wide publicity, with Woodring receiving most of the credit for ordering the flight to be made—a fact that greatly angered Johnson.

The difficult position in which the Woodring-Johnson feud placed the military leaders can be seen in an incident that took place when the flight to Argentina was under consideration. After Johnson had received the idea of the flight, but before he went to the President, he told General Craig what he was going to do, adding, "Don't tell the Secretary." Craig immediately replied that the Secretary was his chief and that it was his duty to keep him informed of what was taking place. The General then indicated that if he had one quality, it was that of loyalty. Finally Craig asked Johnson, if he were Secretary, what he would think of an Assistant and a Chief of Staff who kept things from him. Johnson did not reply.53 Such was the situation in the War Department.

Both Secretary Woodring and General Craig were bothered and upset by Johnson's intrigues, but neither was willing to do anything about them. Woodring, who was politically unsure of himself because he did not know what FDR had promised to Johnson, approached Craig in November 1938, asking him to go to the President and explain the condition of the War Department as a result of Johnson's conduct. Craig refused; he did not feel that it was his place to go, since the dispute involved the civilian rather than the military leadership. The Secretary then asked his close friend John C. O'Loughlin, owner and publisher of the Army and Navy Journal, to see the President on the matter. O'Loughlin refused, because he felt that Roosevelt would resent an outsider telling him about one of his own departments. The publisher did, however, discuss the matter with Press Secretary Steve Early. Early said that he already knew about the situation in the War Department, adding that "if Woodring had any guts he would ask the President to relieve
him or Johnson." Woodring was unwilling to take such action, and Roosevelt continued to tolerate the unfortunate situation.

Woodring began to wonder if Roosevelt's tolerance of Johnson's insubordination indicated that Johnson was indeed to replace him. The first few times that the Assistant Secretary informed General Craig that he, Johnson, was about to be named Secretary, Craig passed the information on to Woodring, who naturally became apprehensive, because he didn't know whether Johnson had made up the story or whether he had actually been so informed. Eventually, after several false alarms, Woodring learned to ignore the announcements. Another of Johnson's irritating practices was to plant in the newspapers information that was favorable to him but detrimental to Woodring.

By the fall of 1939 the War Department, according to one cabinet member, was "making a holy show of itself with Woodring and Johnson each trying to outsmart the other." The situation became so bad that on September 8 Woodring went to see Edwin M. Watson, Roosevelt's Military Aide and Secretary. Woodring complained that "Johnson was running away with the War Department." Watson agreed that the matter ought to be straightened out and that one man ought to be in control; but he did not offer to make such a suggestion to the President, and so Woodring dropped the matter. His failure to take the problem directly to Roosevelt stemmed from a number of factors. First, since his influence with the President was on the wane, he did not feel that he was in a strong enough position to approach FDR on the matter. As the world situation grew worse in the late thirties, the views of Roosevelt and Woodring on how to provide adequate national security became more divergent. The result was that, as time passed, so did Woodring's influence, and with it went his strong support from the President. Second, Roosevelt's growing reliance on Louis Johnson led Woodring to feel that if he asked the President to make a choice between the two, FDR might choose Johnson. The Secretary, unfortunately, did not know that when Roosevelt had been told by James Farley that Johnson expected to be named Secretary, he had replied, "I wouldn't name Louis under any circumstances." Woodring felt that Roosevelt, knowing the situation in the War Department, could take action to correct the situation if he so desired, but apparently he did not wish to do so.

By the time that war broke out in Europe in the fall of 1939, the Woodring-Johnson feud was public knowledge, for newspapers and magazines were printing stories about the bitter quarrel. Typical was a Time magazine account of the relations between the two officials: "Only when absolutely necessary do they speak to each other. When official business requires them to communicate, they do so in writing or through harried
subordinates. Mr. Johnson despises Mr. Woodring. Mr. Woodring distrusts and despises Mr. Johnson, who for 27 months has gunned for Mr. Woodring's job." At about the same time the New York Times reported that apparently a group of New Dealers close to the President felt that the rivalry between Woodring and Johnson "for domination within the War Department had reached a point where the President would have to exert his authority." Still the President, who was willing to ignore or sweep "embarrassing administrative problems under the rug," did nothing.

The unfortunate aspect of the feud between the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary was the disruptive effect that it had on the War Department and, consequently, on military preparedness. The continual bickering and fighting at the top became so bad that the military leaders often did not know who was running the department. One example of how the feuding between the two men affected efficiency was an incident that took place in January 1938. While Johnson was out of town on a trip, Woodring rewrote the procedures by which certain aircraft parts should be purchased. Johnson, upon his return, did not approve of Woodring's changes and halted all transactions concerning the parts until the dispute could be settled. In a few weeks the two antagonists agreed to a compromise, and purchasing resumed; but, in the meantime, valuable procurement time had been lost.

The Woodring-Johnson feud placed Chief of Staff Craig in an especially difficult position. Craig's plight was described by one contemporary as being that of a man "sitting on the fence between these two gentlemen. If he followed the Secretary's instructions he would be in bad odor with the Assistant Secretary, who was quite powerful. If he followed the lead of Mr. Johnson, Mr. Woodring would have him called to account. It was an impossible and tragic situation." It was in large part due to this state of affairs that General Craig left his position as Chief of Staff in June 1939 instead of in September. General Marshall, Craig's successor, found himself in the same difficult position, but, like Craig, he never deserted Secretary Woodring. As Marshall later told Johnson, "Mr. Woodring was Secretary of War and I owed loyalty to him." In 1951 Marshall recalled that working under Woodring and Johnson had been "the most miserable experience of my life." As he described it, "I had to be Chief of Staff to a Secretary ... and his first assistant who weren't speaking to each other. They not only didn't make any secret of how they hated and despised each other, they ran to the President behind each other's back."

The feud did more than cause difficulty for the Chief of Staff; it also caused partiality among the generals at the War Department. Those military leaders working closest with the Secretary of War usually became "Woodring men," while those working closest with the Assistant Secretary
became "Johnson men." Because of this division, relations between the military leaders became increasingly strained, and the work of the General Staff became more difficult. The effects of this division upon the department were later recalled by Brig. Gen. William Ritchie, who served as Woodring's aide and pilot from 1935 to 1938. As he remembered it, Johnson frequently pointed out to top members of the Secretary of War's staff that they would do well to pay more attention to his policies since he would soon be Boss and calling the shots. Of this Mr. Woodring was fully aware.

It soon became evident in all echelons of the War Department that Mr. Johnson was the aggressor in this top-level feuding and was continually attempting to undermine the Secretary of War's announced policies, especially when he would be away on business trips or a vacation. Mr. Woodring could never afford to miss a Cabinet meeting, since Mr. Johnson would then sit in as Acting Secretary of War. This situation reached a point where I would have to accompany the Woodrings, even on vacation trips, so as to have a plane standing by to fly him immediately to Washington should his Administrative Assistant give him a hurry call. This situation presented a poor spectacle for the military to see the civilian heads of the War Department engaged in political and personal feuding to the overall detriment of the efficiency and image of the entire Department.

In order to gain a better understanding of the interworkings of the War Department during this period, a close examination will be made of the numerous factors that served to influence one major decision. That decision concerned naming a replacement for Chief of Staff Malin Craig. This example is appropriate in that it deals with one of the most important decisions of the period; it also gives a better understanding of the distrust and lack of cooperation that often characterized relationships both within the War Department and between the War Department and the President. In two respects this example is atypical. First, it was one of the few times that Woodring and Johnson agreed on a matter. Second, the decision that was made was an excellent one, and it ultimately benefited the Army and the nation. As will be seen in later chapters, the strained relationship that existed between the War Department and the White House was to result in some decisions that did not serve the best interests of the nation.

Although General Craig was expected to remain as Chief of Staff until September 1939, Woodring had started to think about a replacement for him as early as March 1937. At that time the Secretary asked Gen. Douglas MacArthur, former Chief of Staff, if he would like to return to his old post after Craig's retirement. When MacArthur indicated that he would not consider such an offer under any circumstances, Woodring dropped the matter and never mentioned it to him again. In the months that followed, there was a great deal of speculation, especially among military men, as to who
would be the next Chief of Staff. The name most frequently mentioned was that of Maj. Gen. Hugh A. Drum, who had expected to receive the post in 1935 but had been disappointed when Roosevelt surprisingly named General Craig to the position. For reasons that are unclear, Woodring showed little enthusiasm over the possibility of Drum's being appointed, and he began to look for another candidate.

In the spring of 1938 Maj. Gen. Stanley Embick, Deputy Chief of Staff, told Woodring of a brigadier general named George C. Marshall, who might be Chief of Staff material. Embick asked that Marshall be brought to Washington so that his work could be closely observed. After Woodring agreed, Marshall was made head of the War Plans Division of the General Staff. The fifty-eight-year-old graduate of the Virginia Military Institute did an excellent job in his new position, and both Woodring and Craig were greatly impressed; however, they hesitated to make Marshall Deputy Chief of Staff, because he was only a brigadier general and they feared that a number of senior officers might resent taking orders from him. One individual who was not hesitant about advancing Marshall was Assistant Secretary Johnson.

Johnson, who had met Marshall before the latter came to Washington, was greatly impressed by him and actively worked for his appointment as Chief of Staff. In fact, it was Johnson who was responsible for Marshall's being made Deputy Chief of Staff. In October 1938 Woodring was out of Washington, and Johnson was Acting Secretary on the day that the War Council was to meet. Although the Deputy Chief of Staff usually attended such meetings, the position was vacant at that time, General Embick having taken a new command. Before the meeting started, Johnson asked General Craig to appoint General Marshall as Deputy Chief. When Craig tried to side-step the issue by replying that the matter would be worked out, Johnson informed him that there would be no War Council meeting until his, Johnson's, wishes were carried out. Craig left the office for a few minutes, after which he returned, and told Johnson that the orders had been issued. Although Woodring was unhappy at the manner in which the appointment was made, he did not complain, because he was glad to see Marshall in that spot.

In spite of the confidence that Woodring had in Marshall, he was still hesitant to support his appointment as Chief of Staff. Woodring considered the matter of seniority to be quite important, and he was concerned about a possible morale problem should the rule of seniority be ignored. For this reason he leaned, perfunctorily, in the direction of Major General Drum as late as the fall of 1938. Marshall was thirty-fourth in seniority, but a rule that no one could be appointed Chief of Staff who could not serve out a full
four-year term before the mandatory retirement age of sixty-four made him the fifth-ranking eligible.\textsuperscript{78}

In November, Roosevelt introduced his new air-rearmament program—a program that Woodring and Craig were less than enthusiastic about because of its tendency to ignore the land forces. Such an attitude placed the two men on unfavorable terms with the White House in late 1938 and early 1939. By January 1939 Woodring, apparently alienated by the pressure being exerted by and on behalf of Drum, appeared to have overcome his earlier concerns on the question of seniority and was willing to support Marshall as the new Chief of Staff; nevertheless, the strained relationship with the President kept him and Craig from making such a recommendation for fear that their support would prejudice Marshall’s chances.\textsuperscript{79} Woodring and Craig recalled that when in 1935 Secretary Dern had made a recommendation as to who should be named Chief of Staff, Roosevelt had rejected it. Woodring therefore decided that he would not recommend anyone unless the President specifically asked him to do so.\textsuperscript{80} This decision was based not only on what had happened in 1935 but also on the fact that the President had made it increasingly clear that because he regarded the Chief of Staff as his personal adviser, “he alone would pick the officer that appealed to him personally.”\textsuperscript{81}

During this period, Johnson continued to push for the appointment of Marshall. This was one of the very few instances in which Woodring and Johnson were in agreement, but at that time they were so at odds and their means of communication were so disrupted that neither was certain of the other’s position. General Marshall knew their views, but he was not anxious that they be publicized for fear that either Woodring or Johnson might drop his support if he knew that the other was supporting him. As Marshall described it, “Johnson wanted me for Chief of Staff, but I didn’t want Woodring to know he was for me. Craig was for me, but I wanted it kept from the President. Woodring was for me, but I didn’t want the others to know.”\textsuperscript{82} The suspicion, distrust, and ill will that prevailed among the personalities involved in selecting the Chief of Staff reveal that the personal relationships both within the War Department and between the War Department and the Commander in Chief were far from smooth. The President, the Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, and the Chief of Staff were anything but a team.

During the first week of April 1939 Roosevelt sent for the records of the outstanding General Officers, so that he could consult them before choosing the next Chief of Staff. At that time Woodring broke his earlier silence and recommended General Marshall.\textsuperscript{83} Whether he did this on his own or whether he was asked by the President to give his opinion is unknown; nor
do we know how forceful his recommendation was. According to Woodring, "I threatened to resign unless he took General Marshall, my nominee."84 In the light of his own standing with the President at that time, it seems highly unlikely that he would have made such a bold move.

On Sunday, 23 April, Roosevelt called Marshall to the White House and informed him that he was to be the new Chief of Staff. Marshall was the first one to know; the President had not yet told anyone else, including the Secretary of War, of his selection. Just why Roosevelt chose him will never be known for certain, but Marshall felt that favorable words from Woodring and from FDR's close friend Harry Hopkins were primary factors.85 That Marshall considered Woodring's role to be very important is evident from a personal letter that he wrote to Woodring on 28 April 1939:

My Dear Mr. Secretary:
I got away so hurriedly yesterday that I had little to say to you in appreciation of your action in nominating me to the President for the job of Chief of Staff. The fact that you selected me is the great compliment to my career, but I am more grateful to you for the very special effort you saw fit to evoke in order to bring about my final selection by the President.86

What weight Woodring's recommendation might have had will never be known, but it would seem that the realization that the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff had to work together would have caused Roosevelt to give Woodring's views at least some consideration.

In addition to Woodring's constant dealings with the President, military leaders, Congressmen, and the Assistant Secretary of War, he was in constant contact with his fellow cabinet members. With some, such as Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson, and Postmaster General James Farley, he got along very well. With others, such as Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper, and Attorney General Homer Cummings, his association was quite satisfactory. Unfortunately, Woodring's relationship with a group of New Dealers in the cabinet and on the White House staff was not much better than his relationship with Louis Johnson. The leader of that group was Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. The feeling between Woodring and Ickes was one of mutual hostility, and from the day that Woodring came into the cabinet until the time he was forced out, Ickes headed an anti-Woodring group that worked almost continually for his removal. In speaking of the efforts to bring about Woodring's removal, Ickes was to say, "I doubt whether any comparable pressure has ever been put on the President in a personal matter."87

In his efforts to force Woodring from the cabinet, Ickes enlisted the aid
of any individual in Roosevelt’s inner circle who did not care for the Secretary of War and wished to see him go. Included in this group at one time or another were Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Secretary of the Treasury; Harry Hopkins, a presidential adviser and later Secretary of Commerce; Sumner Welles, Assistant Secretary of State; Thomas Corcoran, a presidential adviser; Edwin M. Watson, a military aide and adviser to the President; and Steve Early, the President’s Press Secretary. Members of this “White House clique,” as Woodring and his close friends referred to the group, did not work as a unit, but they were united in a common goal, which was to get a new Secretary of War. Louis Johnson was aware of the clique, and he hoped that it would achieve its goal. But he was not associated with it, because most members of the group held no higher opinion of him than they did of Woodring.

The antagonism between Woodring and Ickes had started in 1933 when Woodring wrote a letter to Ickes, criticizing him for the way in which he was handling certain matters pertaining to public works. After the angry Ickes wrote a strong reply to Woodring, telling him to mind his own business, the battle was on. Several more disputes in the next few years further heightened the hostility between the two. Ickes made no secret of this antagonism; thus, when Woodring was being considered to fill the vacancy created by the death of George Dern, Ickes voiced his disapproval, because he considered Woodring “distinctly second or third caliber material.” When the appointment was made, Ickes did not hide his disappointment, and a few days later said about the new Secretary of War: “He struts about with inflated chest more sure of himself and more disagreeable and dictatorial than any man I have met in the Government. He is a damned little upstart with no background and no imagination.” It was clear what Ickes thought of Woodring. While Woodring’s dislike of the Secretary of the Interior was considerable, he was not so open in saying so.

The first attempt to force Woodring out came in the late summer of 1937, when Ickes confidentially informed a writer for the Washington Evening Star that Woodring was on his way out and that he would be sent to the Philippines as High Commissioner. It was hoped that the rumor would make it easier for the President to take such action, since everyone concerned would be more or less expecting it. Woodring’s denials that he was leaving the War Department failed to quell the rumors; they did not die until Roosevelt emphatically declared that Woodring would remain. At this time the Secretary of War and the President still saw eye to eye, and things in the War Department were running smoothly; consequently, Roosevelt had no serious thoughts of replacing Woodring. That the War Secretary was satisfied with his present position became evident in the spring
of 1938, when, with a rather strong senatorial boom developing for him in Kansas, he punctured the balloon by saying, "I am perfectly happy and completely absorbed in my present work." 93

In the fall of 1938, however, Roosevelt’s ideas on having Woodring remain as Secretary of War had begun to change, for by that time the two men were disagreeing on certain defense matters. 94 The prospect of a new Secretary of War now became more and more appealing. Although Roosevelt would have liked to see Woodring go, he could not bring himself to force him out. FDR was an extremely soft individual when it came to dealing with personal friends; he wanted to be liked, and he did not wish to do anything that might endanger a long friendship. 95 As one contemporary journalist said, "Firing associates is not one of Roosevelt’s strong points." 96 Since the President could not bring himself to fire Woodring or ask for his resignation, he hoped to offer him an attractive post, such as an ambassadorship, so that he would willingly step down from his cabinet post. FDR thought that such offers would either be accepted or that they would at least cause Woodring to realize that he was not wanted in his present position and thus would bring about his resignation. 97

Roosevelt’s strategy did not work on Woodring for a number of reasons. First, Woodring did not want to leave Washington. He and Helen led a dazzling life as they set the social pace for the Roosevelt administration. It is doubtful whether any couple in the nation’s capital had more friends, did more entertaining, or were entertained more than the Woodrings. They both enjoyed such a life, and they did not relish the thought of giving it up. Furthermore, because the Secretary had three small children, he was somewhat reluctant to move to a foreign country. 98 Second, Woodring considered himself a fighter. If there was anything he did not like, it was a quitter. To resign when the going got rough at the War Department would be the same as quitting, and therefore it was unthinkable. Third, Woodring liked his job; he truly enjoyed all the power, pageantry, and publicity that came with his cabinet post. Fourth, he liked action, and he liked a real challenge. As time passed and the nation began to rearm, his job at the War Department became increasingly important and difficult, and the challenge made him more determined than ever to remain at his post. For all these reasons Woodring refused to resign. 99

The first time that President Roosevelt actually indicated a desire to ease Woodring out of the cabinet was on 24 December 1938, when he told Louis Johnson that he was going to see if Woodring would be acceptable to Canada as the United States Minister. This idea was part of a larger plan to reshuffle the cabinet. Under the contemplated scheme, which the President had started to formulate in early December when Attorney General
Homer Cummings resigned, Frank Murphy, Governor of Michigan, would be named Attorney General; Woodring would be sent to Canada; and Johnson would be made Secretary of War. Then, after a short period, Johnson would be sent to the Philippines as High Commissioner, Murphy would be transferred to the War Department, and Solicitor General Robert Jackson would be made Attorney General. The reason that Jackson was not made Attorney General immediately was that he was a New Yorker, and another New Yorker, Harry Hopkins, had just been named to the cabinet; with two other members of the cabinet from the Empire State, the President feared a public reaction against the lack of geographical balance in the cabinet. When Ickes and Roosevelt discussed this plan on 29 December, Ickes voiced his wholehearted approval, especially for the moves in the War Department, since both Woodring and Assistant Secretary Johnson had “created an unpleasant situation by lining up generals on each side and openly fighting for the place.”

The first phase of the President’s plan went into effect on 30 December, when he appointed Murphy as Attorney General. Then the scheme ran into difficulty, for when Roosevelt offered Woodring the Canadian post, he turned it down. With Woodring’s rejection of the position in Canada, FDR’s reshuffling plan came to a halt, since the President was unwilling to force him from office. When Roosevelt’s close associates asked him why he did not remove Woodring, he replied that such a move would be politically unwise, because it might result in a loss of the Kansas delegation at the 1940 Democratic convention. Since Roosevelt made such statements even before he was apparently considering a third term, it would seem that he was using the Kansas delegation as an excuse.

At the same time that he turned down the offer of the Canadian post, Woodring told the President that there was one job that he would be interested in—Ambassador to England. At the time such an appointment seemed out of the question, because Roosevelt was pleased with the work of Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy. Furthermore, it was doubtful whether Woodring could afford the post, because Kennedy was forced to spend $70,000 a year from his own pocket, and Woodring did not have that kind of money. Secretary Ickes contended that Woodring’s father-in-law, Senator Coolidge, had agreed to put up half a million dollars to finance the post, but in reality the figure was $5,000 (a good example of Ickes’s tendency to exaggerate). That Woodring had an interest in the London job was made evident in a letter of 20 June 1939 to his friend M. M. Levant. At that time he indicated his satisfaction with his present job, but he added that “if the Ambassadorship to the Court of St. James were offered me, it would be quite a temptation, as it would be quite an experience for a country Kansas
A short time later, however, he denied having any such interest. In a trans-Atlantic phone conversation with Woodring, Ambassador Kennedy revealed a desire to leave his post, saying, "Anything you can do to get me home is what I want." Woodring stated that he did not want the job, but that he wanted to remain in his present position until 1941. Nevertheless, throughout the summer of 1939 Woodring continued to be mentioned as being under consideration for a diplomatic post in Ottawa or London.

On 30 August 1939 Harlan Miller of the Washington Post indicated that Woodring might be induced to take the Canadian position, "but a war crisis involving us might keep him at his present post." Two days later that crisis came when Germany attacked Poland. Any chance that Woodring would voluntarily resign was now gone, for he had always wanted to be at the center of action, and after 1 September 1939 the War Department was such a place. With the outbreak of war in Europe putting new pressures on the military, Roosevelt again toyed with the idea of removing Woodring. Attorney General Murphy, who had come into the cabinet with the understanding that he would soon be named Secretary of War, was getting anxious to make the change, and in early September he asked Ickes to discuss the matter with the President. At that time Roosevelt assured Ickes that Woodring was on his way out; however, the weeks slipped by, and still nothing happened.

Up to this time, Roosevelt's refusal to replace Woodring was due to his reluctance to remove an old friend and possibly to his desire to ensure the support of the Kansas delegation at the next Democratic convention; but after war broke out in Europe, there arose another consideration that made him reluctant to act. That consideration was expressed by columnist Ernest K. Lindley, who said: "By his [Woodring's] spunky stand for a cautious foreign policy he has won many new friends. Any attempt to force him out almost certainly would provoke the open charge that it was because of his wholehearted opposition to dangerous entanglements in the current European war." Woodring, by making strong pledges of noninvolvement, was becoming a well-known spokesman for those individuals who advocated non-intervention at any cost except in the case of aggression against the United States. To remove the Secretary of War would appear to be an attack on the isolationists, and Woodring could well become a rallying point for their cause. For this reason Roosevelt was more reluctant than ever to act.

In November, Ickes went to the President and asked that something be done about the situation in the War Department, where the feuding was becoming a "public scandal." Ickes then offered his advice on how to get rid of Woodring. As he later explained it, "My plan was to build up in Woodring's mind the idea that Dublin was a very important and critical
post now on account of the war, that the President wanted a strong man there, and that this job might lead to an even better one." When Roosevelt indicated that he did not think such a plan would convince Woodring to leave, Ickes said, "I think you ought to tell him that he has the choice of Dublin or Kansas." When FDR said nothing, Ickes added, "You just can't do that sort of thing, can you, Mr. President." "No, Harold, I can't," replied Roosevelt. 111 As 1939 came to an end, the President still wanted a new Secretary of War, but "being one who was forever putting off anything distasteful," he would not replace Woodring. 112

During the early part of 1940 Roosevelt continued his efforts to ease Woodring out. In January, when he learned that William Phillips, United States Ambassador to Italy, was planning to resign, he offered the job to Woodring, who thanked him for the offer but politely declined it. After this incident, Drew Pearson and Robert Allen concluded that "apparently it's going to take more than a sugar-coated hint to dislodge the Secretary of War." 113

At about this time, Ickes, who now seemed to be obsessed with the idea of removing Woodring, suggested to Roosevelt that he make Woodring Ambassador to France and that he appoint the present ambassador, William Bullitt, as Secretary of War. The President rejected the idea by maintaining that Bullitt was so popular with the French officials and people that he could not possibly make such a change. 114 In February and March, Woodring's name was again mentioned as a possible replacement for Kennedy in London, but Roosevelt persuaded Kennedy to remain at his post, so that possibility faded. 115 Up to this time, all efforts to persuade Woodring to leave his post had failed, and one Washington columnist concluded that Woodring's "defense of his post against all assaults has been a tactical masterpiece which probably will be studied by military men for decades." 116

After rejection of his plans to send Woodring to Ireland or France, Ickes continued to ponder the question of how to remove him, and in May 1940 he came up with what he called a "brilliant idea" to accomplish his goal. On May 17, a few hours before a regularly scheduled cabinet meeting, Ickes explained his latest plan to the President. At the meeting that afternoon he intended to say in effect: "Mr. President, when you selected us as members of your Cabinet, the world was at peace . . . [but] conditions have so radically changed that I think it is only fair that all of us should resign and leave you free either to revamp your present Cabinet . . . or to constitute an entirely new one." Ickes would then offer his resignation, and when the other cabinet members followed suit, the President could accept the resignations of those men he wanted out and refuse those of anyone he wished to retain. Ickes told Roosevelt what he planned to do, because he felt that
if the President did not know about it, he might, in his surprise, say something that would make it more difficult to get rid of Woodring. Although the plan was aimed specifically at Woodring, Ickes did not say so to the President. After Ickes made his scheme known, Roosevelt said, “Why, I couldn't do that, Harold. Some of the members of the Cabinet might think that I don't want them.” Feeling that Ickes’s proposal would place him in an awkward and difficult position, the President turned it down and then added, “It isn't necessary anyhow, because I am going to ask Woodring's resignation.” Ickes, who had heard that story before, laughed impolitely and said, “Mr. President, you will never do it.” To this, Roosevelt replied, “You don't know what I can do when I make up my mind.”117 More than a month later Roosevelt finally did what many intimates were convinced that he could never do—force Woodring from office. The factors that finally caused the President to act will be examined in chapter 10.

There can be no doubt that the activities of Johnson, Ickes, and the New Deal clique did much to hamper Woodring's effectiveness as Secretary of War. With an assistant doing everything he could to undermine his superior, there soon developed distrust and confusion throughout the War Department. As a result, overall efficiency suffered. The continual efforts of Ickes and the occasional help of Murphy and Morgenthau in the attempt to replace Woodring indicate that the teamwork and cooperation of the cabinet left something to be desired. Woodring's influence was also undercut by Roosevelt's frequent statements to various officials that he was going to remove him. Such comments indicated to those men around the President that he lacked confidence in his Secretary of War. All of these factors caused Woodring's years as Secretary to be one continuous battle to stay in office. Much of the time and energy that he was forced to use just to keep his job could have been more effectively used in working for the good of the Army. With all the time spent feuding, it was amazing that Woodring was able to accomplish as much as he did. One can only speculate as to what he might have accomplished had those feuds been avoided.