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**B-36 'Bad Gamble With Security'  
And Useless in Atomic Defense,  
Radford Testifies at House Probe**

**Admiral Charges It Could Be  
'Billion Dollar Blunder'**

By Chris Mathisen

Admiral Arthur W. Radford, described by the Navy as its No. 1 airman, told the House Armed Services Committee today that the Air Force's six-engined B-36 bomber "is a bad gamble with national security," would prove "useless defensively and inadequate offensively" in atomic war, and might turn out to be a "billion dollar blunder."

Repeating in public the statement he gave the committee at a closed session yesterday, Admiral Radford charged the Air Force with undermining armed services unification by "precipitate action" in pushing forward on procurement on the intercontinental bomber with what he said was inadequate proof of the big plane's capabilities.

Pointing out that the B-36 first was ordered from the manufacturer in 1943 after several years of designing, Admiral Radford said that he did not object to the original 100-plane order of that year but only to continued Air Force devotion to what he said "in the last analysis is a 1941 airplane."

The Pacific Fleet commander emphasized that he was not presenting the official views of the Navy Department in the House committee's inquiry into over-all defense strategy. But there was no doubt that Admiral Radford was stating the case of naval aviation as an essential mobile striking force in modern warfare.

**Procedures called unjustified.**

"The unusual procedures used to push the B-36 program to its present status were not justified," he declared. "They undermine all unification; they prevent progress toward mutual trust, understanding and unified planning; they shortcut the vital and proven procedures developed through experience for safeguarding the security of our country."

"The plan itself is not so important as the acceptance or rejection of the theory of atom blitz warfare which it symbolizes," he said. "It is fortunate that honest doubts as to the adequacy of the B-36 have served to bring this more vital issue before the country."

He gave the committee his opinion that the threat of atomic retaliation would not be an effective deterrent to war and would not win a war. But if it is decided that "retaliatory atomic blitz" is to become the defensive policy of the United States, he contended, "then we must have a much more efficient weapon than the B-36 to deliver this blitz."

**Over Matthews' objection.**

Reading the statement that the committee voted, 9 to 6, to make public over the objection of Secretary of the Navy Matthews, who contended it would "give comfort to a possibly enemy," Admiral Radford made these points:

1. That the B-36 "can be intercepted and destroyed in unacceptable numbers if it is unescorted." Admiral Radford commented that he hoped that any enemy bombers which might attack the United States would "be no better than the B-36."
2. That the B-36 cannot bomb successfully from the high altitudes which are said to constitute a major factor in its alleged invulnerability unless it is intended to be used for mass area bombing.

3. That the Air Force is “concentrating on slow, expensive, very vulnerable, single-purpose, heavy atomic bombers at the expense of small, fast bombers and extremely high performance fighters for which we now have such an urgent need in great numbers.”

4. That the Air Force decided last January [1949] to step up its B-36 procurement program “prior to any inter-service discussion in spite of the fact that this major shift in emphasis concerned not only a weapon, but more importantly, a theory of war and the strategy for waging war.”

5. That the Navy does not want to develop carriers “to usurp a primary role of the Air Force in atomic bombing.” But insists carrier aircraft would be needed in any future war “to insure control of the air in vital sea areas.”

6. That while the Navy and the British have jet fighter planes with “excellent high-altitude performance,” the Air Force apparently does not and “the retarded development of fighters not only has not only has distorted evaluation of the vulnerability of the high level bombers, it also may have implications in the defense of our own military bases and in the defense of our own homeland.

**Says he has wide backing.**

After Admiral Radford read his prepared statement, Mr. [Senator Carl] Vinson noted that he had said he was not giving the official views of the Navy Department.

Admiral Radford said he emphasized that because he had not discussed his statement [with] Mr. Matthews and did not know whether the Secretary concurred.

Mr. Vinson asked him who shared his views. He replied that in “the broad aspects” of what he had outlined as his concept of the function of naval aviation in a future conflict he had the concurrence of practically “every senior officer of the Navy on the active and retired lists.

Asked for names, he mentioned Admiral William F. Halsey, who sat nearby; the Navy’s other three fleet admirals—Chester W. Nimitz, Ernest J. King and William D. Leahy; Admirals Denfield, chief of Naval Operations, W.H.P. Blandy, Atlantic Fleet commander, and Richard L. Conolly, naval commander in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean area.

“I could go on down the list,” Admiral Radford said, but Mr. Vinson said, “No, that’s sufficient.”

**Tells of B-36 Procurement.**

Admiral Radford, who was vice chief of naval operations early this year when the Air Force announced its expanded B-36 procurement plans, recalled that “on the morning of January 12, 1949, the Chief of Naval Operations and I did not know that the Air Force had any plans for the B-36 other than to cut back its procurement.”

“We learned about the Air Force plan for additional procurement by reading the morning newspapers of that date,” Admiral Radford said. “From conversations which I had with Mr. Forrestal (the late James V. Forrestal, first Secretary of Defense) that morning it is my strong belief that this was also the way he learned about this major shift in the procurement plan of the Air Force.”

Thus, Admiral Radford continued, Mr. Forrestal and the Chief of Naval Operations , the latter a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were placed “in the difficult and anomalous position of either going along with the Air Force plans or repudiating them after they had been announced to the public and to the aircraft industry.”

Admiral Radford said the Air Force had started buying B-36s in quantity without the thorough proving which should precede large-scale procurement of any new weapon.

He said a group of the Navy’s top aviation technicians would follow him with elaboration of his contention that the B-36 will not do what the Air Force claims for it. Much of the testimony probably will be heard by the committee in closed session.

**Air Battleship Opposed.**

“We do not quibble over minor differences of opinion as to the range, altitude and airspeed of the B-36,” he emphasized. “It is an unquestionable fact that the plane is capable of flying long distances with heavy loads. Indeed, this characteristic is its only qualification as an intercontinental bomber.”

“Are we as a nation to have bomber generals fighting to preserve the obsolete heavy bomber—the battleship of the air?” Admiral Radford asked, then answered: “Like its surface counterpart, its day has largely passed.”

Admiral Radford, in reply to questions, said Navy aviators had never been permitted to fly the B-36. He said also that the weapons evaluation group has not yet passed on the big bomber.

Admiral Radford said that there had been a very valuable exchange of flyers between the services, but that Navy flyers “have not been allowed” to pilot the B-36.

**Pleads for Evaluation.**

On the question of evaluation, Admiral Radford said the procedure is supposed to evaluate the big plane’s performance in doing the job it is supposed to do.

“To deliver atomic bombs on a distant target?” Representative Brooks, Democrat, of Louisiana, asked.

“Yes.” Admiral Radford replied. “I am pleading for an evaluation and it has not been given to us.”

Mr. Vinson asked Admiral Radford if it were not true that the Navy was given opportunity to explain its needs in defense budget planning sessions and other meetings of high defense officials.

Admiral Radford replied that this was so, but that the Navy could not get its thinking across to the persons having little contact with its concept with the importance of a mobile carrier-borne air striking force.

He said that “some of our civilian secretaries “were in that category and that there was little hope for improvement until “we deal with people who have a better understanding.”

But, Mr. Vinson persisted, wasn’t the Navy’s strength traditionally related to the sea power of potential enemy nations?

Admiral Radford said that was the case “until 1940, when the Navy became air-minded.”

Now, he said, its importance is in its ability “to protect mobile air power anywhere in the world where there’s enough water , and that is a large part of the world—no other nation can do that.”

Representative Short of Missouri, ranking Republican member of the committee, asked Admiral Radford if the committee was to understand that the decision to buy more B-36s “was not jointly reached.” Admiral Radford said that was true and that the decision was apparently made by the Secretary of the Air Force.

Mr. Short then asked if Admiral Radford believed Air Secretary Symington “overrode” the Navy in the matter.

“I feel that he did in that instance,” Admiral Radford answered.

The House group is making an inquiry into current official thinking on how the three armed services should share the task of protecting the United States in the event of another war. Specifically it wants to find out why many high-ranking Navy officers are unhappy with their lot under armed force unification and whether they are justified in their fears for the future of their service.

Meanwhile Capt. John G. Crommelin, suspended for his admitted distribution of copies of official correspondence in which three admirals, including Admiral Radford, indicated concern about the Navy’s status, was awaiting preferment of official charges.

He was confined to the District—a modification of an order which, as first drawn, restricted him to his Georgetown home.



### **Radford's Conclusions**

*Admiral Arthur W. Radford listed the following conclusions at the end of his prepared statement to the House Armed Services Committee today.*

1. The B-36, under any theory of war, is a bad gamble with national security. Should an enemy force an atomic war upon us, the B-36 would be useless defensively and inadequate offensively. The plane itself is not so important as the acceptance or rejection of the theory of atom blitz warfare which it symbolizes. It is fortunate that honest doubts as to the adequacy of the B-36 have served to bring this more vital issue before the country.

2. I do not believe that the threat of atomic blitz will be an effective deterrent to a war, or that it will win a war. I do not believe that the atomic blitz theory is generally accepted by military men. However, if after careful study of all sides of the question the retaliatory atomic blitz were to become the determined and studies policy of the United States, then we must have a much more efficient weapon than the B-36 to deliver the blitz. We are today capable of procuring more effective and more efficient planes for the task than the B-36.

3. Development in the Air Force of planes suitable for tactical and fighter missions has suffered by over-emphasis on the heavy bomber. This is apparent by inspecting the proportions for each category—not in terms of numbers of groups of planes—but in terms of money, men and materials. Less than six per cent of Air Force Research and Development funds is earmarked for tactical and fighter types. The lack of adequate fighters may have grave consequences for future security of our bases and our homeland. It is not only wasteful but may be disastrous to spend our scarce budget dollars on large expensive planes dedicated to an unsound theory of war.

4. The unusual procedures used to push the B-36 program to its present status were not justified. They undermine all unification; they prevent progress toward mutual trust, understanding and unified planning; they short cut the vital and proven procedures developed through experience for safeguarding the security of our country.

5. Any service must be permitted to bring an experimental weapon through the development test and evaluation stages. On the other hand, any service must be prevented from procuring any weapon in quantity until it has passed these stages.

6. We should develop weapons capable of maximum effectiveness from all land and sea areas which we can control. We should push research and development of weapons to this end. We should not, however, base our war plans on such weapons, nor should we procure them in quantity, until they are proven. Our defense budget should not be used for unproven weapons. American taxpayers cannot afford billion dollar blunders. Nor can they afford expensive military procurement on "stop and go" basis involving costly cancellations for which our country receives nothing.

7. Strategic bombing should be a primary role of the Air Force. However, the United States is not sound in relying on the so called "strategic bombing concept["] to its present extent. This concept is symbolized by the B-36 delivering the atom blitz. In the minds of

our citizens this fallacious concept promises a short-cut to victory. Our citizens must realize that its military leaders cannot make this promise—that there is no short-cut, no cheap, no easy way to win a war. We must realize that the best way to win a future war is to prevent it. We must realize that the threat of instant atomic retaliation will not prevent it. We must realize that we cannot gamble that the atom blitz of annihilation will even win a war. We must realize that if war is forced upon us, we must win it, and win it in such a way that it can be followed by a stable, livable peace.

