

The National Security Act of 1947 established the Department of Defense (named the National Military Establishment between 1947 and 1949) as part of a new national security structure for the United States. Exactly a half century after James V. Forrestal took the oath of office as the first secretary of defense, the Department of Defense marked its 50th anniversary on 17 September 1997.

This book presents a 50-year history of the evolution of DoD organization and the top leadership of the department. The higher organization of the department has evolved from the small office of the secretary of defense and three special assistants established in 1947 to a formal Office of the Secretary of Defense, now including more than 2,000 persons. As this study shows, developing an effective department-wide organization concerned Forrestal and most of his successors. Major reorganizations took place in 1949, 1953, 1958, and 1986, with important incremental changes occurring over the years. This book discusses specific organizational issues, such as civil-military relations, the roles and missions of the armed forces, the positions of the service secretaries, and the organization and duties of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, especially its chairman.

The secretaries of defense have come from varied backgrounds and differing perspectives and performed their functions in the Pentagon in accordance with the policies of the administrations they served. All of them had to deal with either the dangers of the Cold War, or actual wars—Korea and Vietnam—or other international crises. They had to concern themselves with the composition, training, equipping, and employment of the armed forces of the United States. They have had to address such important social issues as racial integration and the role of women in the armed forces. The most recent secretaries have had to manage the downsizing of the force in the aftermath of the Cold War while expanding the role of the military in humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts abroad. The essays in this book on the individual secretaries seek to convey some notion of the nature of the challenges each had to face and to present an overall view of the role and importance of the secretary of defense.

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Publications of the OSD Historical Office

*The Department of Defense:
Documents on Establishment and Organization,
1944-1978* (1978)

*A Community of Interests:
NATO and the Military Assistance Program,
1948-1951* (1980)

The Formative Years, 1947-1950
vol. I in *History of the Office of the Secretary
of Defense* (1984)

The Test of War, 1950-1953
vol. II in *History of the Office of the Secretary
of Defense* (1988)

The Pentagon: The First Fifty Years (1992)

Into the Missile Age, 1956-1960
vol. IV in *History of the Office of the Secretary
of Defense* (1997)