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Leahy, William D. (Admiral)

Interview

July 3, 1952

IX/2 (3)

II/50 (1)

The Admiral was waiting with his diary before him. His aide gave me a most cordial welcome. It was evident that Admiral Souers had arranged perfectly. So far as I could tell, Leahy did not dodge a point, He said just what he could remember, with a genial flow of Navy talk. He opened his diary to January 18, 1946 and read an account of the meeting with the President, representatives of the Bureau of the Budget and Department of Justice. This dates exactly the conference of which Souers talked and in which certain agreements were made with Smith of the Budget and apparently with the representative of the FBI. Then on January 23, the day after the Directive, Leahy received a personal letter from President Truman appointing him the "personal representative." He read this letter from the original in his diary. I did not ask if I might use the diary as he had said that it was for himself only.

The Conference at the White House on the Secretaries' Plan

Leahy's Diary

The next day the President gave a luncheon for Souers and Leahy. At the end of it he presented each with a black hat, cloak and dagger and informed them that they were in charge of the Cloak and Dagger Group of Snoopers. Then or soon thereafter Truman informed them that they were his "front and rear admirals." Leahy in particular was the Presidential Personal Snoopers. According to Leahy, Truman considered CIG his personal information service, directly responsible to him. But I should note in this connection, in view of Leahy's statements

Presidential Snoopers

Document No. _____ later with regard to

No Change in Class. From that of Donovan and OSS, that the concept was quite different

Declassified

Class. Changed to: TS (S)

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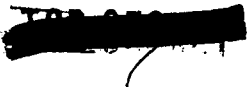
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Then the Admiral turned pages until he found notes on Vandenberg. He said that he did not know who had chosen Vandenberg; he thought that possibly the choice was a result of an agreement between State and Army. Anyway, Leahy was directed by the President to ask General Eisenhower to release Vandenberg. The date was April 26. Eisenhower was reluctant; the Army had other plans for Vandenberg. Leahy raised his heavy black eyebrows and looked up inquiringly as he said he did not know who had selected Vandenberg. Everybody, he said, thought highly of Vandenberg. I assumed that he thought I knew, possibly; and so I remarked that I understood from Admiral Souers that he had something to do with the selection of General Vandenberg. The reason in my mind, I said, was Vandenberg's participation for the Army in the IAB. Leahy replied (meaning Souers) "He's an 'Italian diplomat'," and with his quizzical look continued: "Perhaps he wanted the Senator on our side."

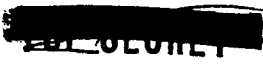
The Choice of Vandenberg

Leahy's Inquiry

Remark on Souers

The second reference to Vandenberg and the only other one which he could recall from his diary and his memory at the moment concerned Vandenberg's request for independent funds in June 1946 as DCI. We talked a few minutes on that subject as I spoke of Houston's letter, June 13, concerning the lack of funds and the likelihood that the Independent Offices Appropriation Act would interfere. But the discussion unfortunately brought no further memory from Admiral Leahy. I did not mention his participation in the July meeting of the NIA, when he told Vandenberg that the Secretaries would be collectively responsible rather than the DCI. I thought I had better not, under the circumstances. He did not seem to remember.

Vandenberg's Funds as Director of Central Intelligence



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Then Admiral Leahy turned to the second matter which undoubtedly Souers had put in his mind, the choice of Hillenkoetter. I must have raised the question why Vandenberg stayed so short a time, for I find in my notes at this point that the Army wanted Vandenberg back for the Air Force. Leahy remembered an "NIA" discussion of it. I have no record in the minutes. I got no remark from Leahy on President Truman's attitude. As I now think of it, I should have asked. Anyway, as Vandenberg was to give up the position, and this was as early as February 1947, the members of NIA talked over possibilities for his successor.

Choice of Hillenkoetter

Early Discussion in "NIA"

Hillenkoetter was on the list. Leahy knew him first at Vichy, not before that time. He said that Hillenkoetter did splendid work there. He was expert in getting information from the French and the Germans, "and he never got caught." The quotation is exact. Admiral Leahy said it not less than three times. Hillenkoetter handled the French and German languages beautifully.

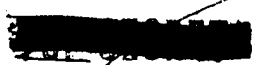
"He Never Got Caught"

Hillenkoetter's qualifications

Leahy told all of this to the "group" (NIA) and recalled for me that Hillenkoetter had done work as a courier for the State Department prior to that time. He had been so successful and given so much time to it for State that, said Leahy, he was not learning much as a naval officer; they had to call him back to the Navy to "learn about ships." While acting as courier he was picking up excellent information for State Department. In short, he was becoming an expert "intelligence agent." Leahy also said that State tried to get Hillenkoetter again. Forrestal too spoke in favor of Hillenkoetter. The result was that on February 17, 1947 it was approved by NIA and President Truman that Hillenkoetter should be assigned to the office of DCI.

Leahy Impressed

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When Leahy spoke of the date, February 17, I recalled that it was five days after the NIA meeting in which they had agreed to make the DCI (Vandenberg) executive agent of the Secretaries. Leahy said: "That was a good idea." I noted this because he had persuaded Vandenberg to drop the word "agent" in the previous summer and accept merely "act for" the Secretaries. We talked for a while on Vandenberg's troubles with "IAB" over collection. This revived Leahy's memory and gave him material for subsequent discussion of the question of "individual responsibility." I did not remind him that he had previously urged Vandenberg to give up the position; it seemed to me that I could irritate him if I did. Leahy, however, did not give the impression of being one who would object to having his change of position pointed out.

Vandenberg
"Executive
Agent"
for the
Secretaries

Collection

Previous
Advice

He laid his diary aside. I asked if I might ask further questions. He remarked that he had nothing to do. There was plenty of time. We turned to those I had brought with me, but he did not take the paper; so I read from the list and he replied.

The first was with regard to Donovan's "independent directorate" as Secretary Stimson's letter of May 1, 1945 told Donovan that nothing would be done until the close of the war. This sent Leahy off on Donovan's shortcomings. Souers is right. Leahy still does not like Donovan. Leahy said that President Roosevelt could not get along with Donovan and so had told the Joint Chiefs of Staff to see if they could get along with Donovan. They could not get along with Donovan. Yes, he took orders. But he went ahead and did things, and advised them

Leahy
on
Donovan

Roosevelt's
Experience



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Leahy
and
Marshall

later. Sometimes, it was very much later. But, evidently Marshall got along with Donovan. I had enough sense not to ask Leahy if he liked Marshall. There was a magnificent picture of Marshall on the wall to the right of Admiral Leahy's desk. I do not believe that there is anything more than strong disagreement between them, notwithstanding Souers' comment.

Central
Intelligence
Not
Independent
Directorate

Leahy said that both Roosevelt and Truman thought of the central intelligence organization as a presidential service directly responsible to the President. This however is not to be confused with Donovan's idea of an independent directorate and an agency which could ignore the other agencies. I am not sure that Donovan meant to have OSS ignore the other agencies. Probably those words are inaccurate. But that is the impression which I thought I got from Leahy, as I had previously from Souers. It reflects the rivalry and irritation of the Armed Services. Vandenberg was outspoken against the "free-wheeling" of OSS.

"OSS"
Too
Independent

The
Joint Chiefs'
Plan

I endeavored to refresh Admiral Leahy's memories concerning the Joint Chiefs of Staff in September 1945. Leahy did not seem to remember much about their plan for Central Intelligence. He was aware of State's plan and certain that the Department should never be allowed to control the central intelligence organization. He practically said that the Armed Services did not trust the Department of State. Later on he referred to Hiss and showed deep feeling, the conviction of a man who had taken the oath of loyalty as a youngster, for "the honor of the corps."

The State
Department's
Plan

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Sometime in this discussion he remarked that President Roosevelt did not trust State. President Truman came later to have regard for State and to accept its advices. He likes Acheson, and so does Leahy. But Leahy holds against Acheson his defense of Hiss. However, Leahy said that about all he knew of the Hiss case he had read in Chambers' testimony. Leahy remembered McCormack as a "G-2" man, whom of course Marshall supported. (I have found no evidence however that Marshall, or Byrnes preceding him, supported the plan of the State Department because of McCormack himself.)

I asked him what part the Navy had played in defeating the McCormack plan and replacing it with the JCS plan near the first of January. Admiral Leahy did not know much about it. He had no notes in his diary. This seemed to bear out what Souers had said; Leahy was not called upon to work in the details at the time. I mentioned Forrestal's activity. He said that Forrestal was very active but was accustomed to give verbal orders. Leahy doubted that there would be many papers on the Navy's participation. He did not know either much about the episode of the three Secretaries. I explained it briefly. He listened with much interest but no comment.

I did not raise the question of the Eberstadt Report at all but went on to Leahy's opinion of unification and the place of central intelligence in it. His mind rolled back to the idea which he had presented at the start; the CIG was meant to be the President's personal information service. It should not be pulled away from the Departments. That was not necessary. The Donovan idea was wrong.

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Truman
and
Acheson

McCormack

Navy's Part

Forrestal

The Three
Secretaries

The Group
among
the
Departments

Leahy said the DCI should be close to the President. There was no inconsistency in Admiral Leahy's thinking. His view was that Donovan wished to be a law unto himself. The idea of Leahy and Souers was, and the privilege of General Smith today is, that the DCI can have personal access to the President almost anytime. The reverse is certain. Whenever the President wishes information he can call upon the service for it.

The President's Service

This meant to Leahy, as it developed immediately, that the Armed Services must give all of the intelligence they have to CIA if the Agency needs it. This includes operation intelligence, information with regard to "capabilities and intentions." We talked at this point about the possibility of a Russian sweep to the Channel and an estimate by the CIA with regard to the ability of the United States to check it. I said that at Christmas I had been given a bit of a job and had run immediately into the "continuing problem" of resistance, in fact refusal, on the part of the JCS to release the necessary information.

All Information Operational Included

This sent Admiral Leahy on a round of remarks. The Armed Services must give information to the President's information service. There could be no proper estimate without it, of course. (His eyes were serious.) He repeated, "The Services ought to give information when Beedle asks for it." "But still, they might not." (His eyes were merry.) We had lost track of unification and the establishment of the Department of Defense. We never got back to it. The next question on my list had already been answered - that with regard to

"Capabilities and Intentions" of the United States

~~TOP SECRET~~

the function of Admiral Leahy as personal representative of the President. I did not ask him about the position of the Intelligence Advisory Board. But in the course of our talk somewhere, I don't remember just where now, probably in connection with Vandenberg's troubles, Leahy favored the Director over the Board.

Director
over
Board

I did ask him if he thought that CIG-CIA should be a productive agency. He said yes. In his mind were the traditional functions of SI and X-2 and the collection of clandestine information. This, he believed, the Agency could do better than the Armed Services. They on the other hand could obtain information as the Agency could not.

Production
and
Collection

There should be mutual exchange without hesitation. He was, I think, disappointed that the intelligence services had resisted so strongly coordination by the central group. But we did not go into the controversy. I did not ask him specifically about research and evaluation. He himself spoke of evaluation as a function of the central group and, as I have indicated above, said that in making its estimates it should have access to all of the material.

Failure
of
Coordination

Coordination
and
Mutual
Exchange
Access to
Material

His memory was active concerning my next question on individual responsibility, primarily in determining estimates. On this point he agreed thoroughly with Vandenberg. The "DCI" was responsible. There should be room for dissent, of course, and the policy makers had the right to take the dissenting view. The "DCI" however was in a position of a commanding officer. As I recall the discussion, that was Admiral Leahy's view. It was of course his whole life as a naval officer.

Individual
Responsibility
of the
Director

Estimates
Dissents

~~TOP SECRET~~

Continuity
and
Tenure

I asked him why it was necessary to make the change from Vandenberg to Hillenkoetter at the time when Congress was working on the new statute and continuity in office was a matter under serious consideration. I said that they were even talking of having a period of fourteen years for the Director of Central Intelligence, comparable to the tenure of office in the Bureau of the Budget, for example. The Admiral's answer was that the Army had, practically speaking, lent Vandenberg to the Group in the first place and then had asked to have him released so that he might head the new Air Force. Leahy did not like the idea of fourteen years or any other fixed tenure. He thought that the Director should be removable at the President's pleasure, evidently without regard to commitment to any other service.

Recall
of
Vandenberg

A
Civilian
as
Director

The Admiral was not opposed to having a civilian as Director of Central Intelligence. I do not now recall any particular phrase which he used to express his view. He had expressed serious doubt of the State Department. I presume that he did not wish to see that kind of a civilian in the office of Director of Central Intelligence.

The Agency
as the
"Fourth Arm"

Membership
in the
Joint Chiefs
of Staff

I asked him directly what he thought of the suggestion that the Central Intelligence Agency should be the "fourth arm" and have equal position in the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He positively did not favor the idea. Whether this came from his opposition to Donovan I do not know. In Leahy's mind, the Central Intelligence Agency is the President's immediate and personal service. The "DCI" is responsible to the President regardless of the National Security Council.

Admiral Leahy did not like at all to think of the Agency as engaging in black propaganda as it was at the time with "OPC." He



Leahy
on
Propaganda

Physical
Subversion

Guerrilla
Warfare

gave no indication of what he knew about the business of "magnitude and scope" but he was very positive in his statement. He certainly did not want the Agency to engage in physical subversion. He recalled that he did not like the Maquis. That, said Leahy, was not war. It was "murder." He was probably "old fashioned," he said, but he did not think that guerrilla warfare and such practices were the business of "CIA." Its job was to get information, primarily for the President.

