

March 15, 1957

General Matthew B. Ridgway, USA (Ret)
Chairman of the Board, Mellon Institute
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dear General Ridgway:

It was a genuinely distinct pleasure to have talked to you over the phone yesterday morning and to hear your voice again.

As you recall, during our conversation you raised the question of how any testimony that you might give at the forthcoming trial of Colonel John C. Nickerson, Jr., would be relevant and material to the issues. I am inclosing a copy of the charges and specifications upon which he will be arraigned. As you will note, the bulk of the specifications allege a violation of a lawful general regulation, to-wit: Army Regulation 380-5. The other charges and specifications result from an investigation conducted by the Inspector General of the Department of the Army and the Inspector General of the Third United States Army. At the present we are not too concerned about those specifications and charges which do not allege violations of Army Regulation 380-5.

The reason I called you yesterday and the reason I am writing to you today is that I would very much like to receive an expression of your opinion as to the vital necessity of an Army commander exercising immediate and direct control over all the weapons that are essential to accomplish his mission; that is, whether you consider it necessary that a combat commander exercise such control or whether you prefer the alternate solution of a combat commander exercising control over only a limited number of weapons and being forced to call upon another service in order to obtain certain weapon support required to accomplish his mission--in other words, the alternate solution being that which is now in existence, that is, forcing a ground commander to depend upon the Air Force for tactical support. The ground commander, at least below the level of a Supreme Commander in a Theater, exercises no direct control over any tactical support which may be given him by the Air Force. At best, he must go through lengthy channels to get this support with all the concomitant delay that follows going through such channels; at the worst, he must practically appeal for help from the Air Force, which often places him in the position of being dependent upon the indulgence of the Air Force commander. I am certain that you can give the most valuable and forceful expression of opinion along these lines.

The simple question that I pose to you is essentially the root cause of the whole controversy and which led Colonel Nickerson into his present

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difficulties. It had its origin in the so-called Wilson Memorandum which was issued to the press on 26 November 1956. I am inclosing a copy of that Memorandum in order to make our position a little clearer to you. As you will note, the Memorandum attempts to define the roles and missions of the three armed services of the United States and limits the Army to the development and employment of a guided missile of not over 200 miles in range because the battlefield of the future is arbitrarily defined as being an area 100 miles in front of the line of contact with the enemy and 100 miles to the rear. At the time this Memorandum was issued, Colonel Nickerson was stationed at Redstone Arsenal, working intensely on the development of an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile. This missile was designed to have a range considerably in excess of 200 miles with a high degree of accuracy. As you know, the Army is employing the team of German and American scientists that is popularly known as "the von Braun team." That group developed the present Redstone missile which was displayed at the Inaugural parade, and the German part of this team developed the V-2 missile which was used by the German Army, under artillery control, during the latter part of World War II.

Under the impact of the Wilson Memorandum, Colonel Nickerson felt strongly that if the Memorandum was implemented and carried to its logical conclusion, the security of the United States would be greatly endangered. This was so for a number of reasons. First, he felt that the Memorandum would have the effect of dissolving the von Braun team. Every key member of that team has repeatedly received lucrative offers from private industry, and the team remains in existence only because its members feel that they are engaged in a very challenging task which provides them with considerable professional satisfaction. With the dissolution of the von Braun team, Colonel Nickerson felt that the development of an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile would suffer an irreparable time lag because in his opinion the von Braun team has advanced much further in their work than the Air Force has with its parallel project. As you know, the Army operates in a different manner than does the Air Force in developing weapons. We have an integrated development organization, whereas the Air Force depends largely, if not entirely, upon various private industries to develop their weapons and aircraft, and that is the approach that is now being made by the Air Force towards the development of its missile; some aircraft companies are charged with designing and producing certain component parts of the Air Force Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile; certain other companies are charged with developing the other component parts. The second reason Colonel Nickerson acted as he did is that he sincerely believed that the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile is essentially an artillery weapon and should be employed by the Army as an artillery weapon and be under the direct control of the Army commander who needed such artillery support to accomplish his mission.

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Colonel Nickerson wrote a paper, "Considerations on the Wilson Memorandum," to forcefully bring to the attention of certain key people the urgency of a modification of the Memorandum, and in his enthusiasm to obtain aid acted indiscreetly and was critical of the roles and missions concept expressed in the Memorandum.

It is our contention that nobody can accurately envision what the next war will be like; however, it is plain that the situation will be much more fluid than it has been in our past wars, and that the limits of the battlefield will be much harder to delineate than they have in the past. It follows from our contention that greater flexibility in the use of men and weapons will be needed, and with this greater flexibility it will be necessary for the Army commander to exercise immediate and direct control over supporting fire given by long range missiles rather than being forced to request such support from the Air Force.

Now, sir, to attempt to answer your question as to how your testimony would be relevant and material. It simply boils down to this fact: Colonel Nickerson as a professional soldier felt that it was necessary to take effective action as quickly as possible to correct the situation. Therefore, his motive in doing what he did is going to be a key question in the trial. Your testimony will be relevant and material in this respect--if you agree to the soundness of the concept which I have briefly outlined above, it will have great weight in showing that his motive was sound, however unwise the action that he took may have been. I am requesting your assistance because in my considered judgment and from experience I have never known of a more firm, forceful, and clear-sighted military leader. I say that from both personal observation and information obtained by reading and from other sources.

I should like to briefly outline for you who Colonel Nickerson is. He was born in Paris, Kentucky in 1915. His father was an important executive of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. In 1933 he entered the University of Kentucky and spent one year majoring in industrial chemistry. In 1934, as a result of competitive examinations for aspirants for appointment to the Military Academy, he was appointed by the then Senator Alben Barkley. He was graduated from the Military Academy in 1938. He spent one or two years in Hawaii and then after the war clouds began to darken, he was returned to the United States and assigned to the Eighth Infantry Division, in which organization he rose to be the commander of a field artillery battalion of the Eighth Division Artillery. He served in that capacity throughout the war and served with distinction. He has a Silver Star with one Oak Leaf Cluster for gallantry he displayed in action. He also has the Bronze Star medal for meritorious service, the French Croix de Guerre and the Luxembourg Croix de Guerre. Following his wartime service he was returned to this country and he became engaged in Research and Development. While engaged in that work he was sent to the California Institute of Technology as Liaison Officer to the Jet

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Propulsion Laboratory, and while there he obtained permission from his superiors to take post-graduate work in addition to his other duties. At his own expense he attended California Institute of Technology and received a Master of Science degree in 1946. Since that time he has worked in various positions in the research and development phase of guided missiles. I was most pleased to note that his 201 file contains some very complimentary remarks made by Field Marshal Alexander of the British Army. Field Marshal Alexander wrote to you, to Mr. Stevens, and to Mr. Quarles, specifically mentioning Colonel Nickerson by name and expressing his appreciation for the commendable way in which he performed the duty that was given to him, which was to escort the Field Marshal and to explain to him what work the Army was doing in the guided missile field. There is also a letter contained in that file from you to Field Marshal Alexander expressing your pleasure for the recognition given to Colonel Nickerson.

There is one point that I should like to make before I close. As mentioned earlier, we are not too concerned with any of the specifications which do not allege violations of AR 380-5. For example, the specifications alleging false official statements are in my opinion trick specifications and are the result of a technicality rather than substantial fact. Colonel Nickerson was being pressed very hard by two different Inspectors General and under the stress of interrogation made some statements which he later sought to correct when he had time to reflect upon them, but he was not permitted to do so. As for Specification I of Charge II which alleges a violation of a portion of the "Espionage Act" I consider that patently absurd and feel very strongly that no court composed of officers of the United States Army would give it the slightest credence. In this respect I might add that I have numerous statements from officers under whom Colonel Nickerson has served and from officers with whom he has been associated. All of these statements say that he is a dedicated officer who puts duty above self-interest, and whose integrity and loyalty are above question.

If there is anything further that you desire, any more information, please let me know and I will respond immediately. I am,

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES R. ZIMMER
Lt. Colonel JAGC
Defense Counsel

2 Inclosures

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DRAFT

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The reason I called you yesterday and the reason I am writing to you today is that I would very much like to receive an expression of your opinion as to the vital necessity of a ^{- Army -} ~~ground combat~~ commander exercising immediate and direct control over all the weapons that are essential to accomplish his mission; that is, whether you consider it necessary that a combat commander exercise such control or whether you prefer the alternate solution of a combat commander exercising control over only a limited number of weapons and being forced to call upon another service in order to obtain certain weapon support required

to accomplish his mission -- in other words the alternate solution being that which is now in existence, that is, forcing a ground commander to depend upon the Air Force for tactical support. ~~He~~ ^{The} ground commander, at least below the level of a Supreme Commander in a Theater, exercises no direct control over any tactical support which may be given him by the Air Force, ~~and the situation being,~~ ^{At} best, ~~that~~ he must go through lengthy channels to get this support with all the ^{very} concomitant ~~delay~~ ^{that} follows going through such channels; ~~or,~~ at the worst, he must practically appeal for help from the Air Force which ^{OFTEN PLACES} ~~amounts to, in some cases,~~ ^{THE} placing him in a position of being dependent upon the indulgence of the Air Force commander. I am certain that you can give the most valuable and forceful expression of opinion along these lines.

The simple question that I pose to you is essentially the root cause of the whole controversy and which led Colonel Nickerson into his present difficulties. It had its origin in the so-called Wilson Memorandum which was issued to the press on 26 November 1956. I am inclosing a copy of that Memorandum in order to make our position a little ^{clearer} ~~more clear~~ to you. As you will note, the Memorandum attempts to define the roles and missions of the three armed services of the United States and limits the Army to the development and employment of a guided missile of not over 200 miles in range because the battlefield of the future is ^{ARBITRARILY} ~~arbitrarily~~ defined as being an area 100 miles in front of the line of contact with the enemy and 100 miles to the rear. At the time this Memorandum was issued, Colonel

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Under the impact of the
~~As a result of the Wilson Memorandum, Colonel Nickerson (was) felt strongly~~
~~(greatly disturbed because he deeply felt and had the firm conviction)~~
 that if the Memorandum was implemented and carried to its logical conclusion, ~~that~~ the security of the United States would be greatly endangered. This was so for a number of reasons. First, he felt that the Memorandum would have the effect of dissolving the von Braun team, ~~because~~ Every key member of that team has repeatedly received lucrative offers from private industry, and the team ~~only~~ remains in existence ^{ONLY} because ^{ITS} ~~the~~ members ~~of it~~ feel that they are engaged in a very challenging task ~~and one~~ which provides them with considerable professional satisfaction. With the dissolution of the von Braun team, ^{COLONEL NICKERSON} ~~he~~ felt that the development of an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile would suffer an irreparable time lag because in his opinion the von Braun team has advanced much further in their work than the Air Force has with its parallel project, ~~of developing an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile.~~ As you know, the Army operates in a

Old Arsenal System

different manner than does the Air Force in developing weapons. We have ~~an integrated development organization, somewhat similar to the Arsenal System~~ whereas the Air Force depends largely, if not entirely, upon various private industries to develop their weapons and aircraft, and that is the approach that is now being made by the Air Force towards the development of its missile; ~~that is, some~~ aircraft companies are charged with designing and producing certain component parts of the Air Force Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile; certain other companies are charged with developing the other component parts. ~~(In brief, there is no unified group which exercises control over the entire development of the Air Force missile.)~~ So much for

~~the first reason that Colonel Nickerson was agitated. The second~~ ^{Further} ~~reason was that he was convinced~~ ^{COLONEL NICKERSON, acted as he did, it he sincerely believed} that the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile is essentially an artillery weapon and should be employed by the Army as an artillery weapon and be under the direct control of the ^{Army} ~~ground~~ commander who needed such artillery support to accomplish his mission.



~~Colonel Nickerson wrote a paper, "Considerations on the Wilson Memorandum," to quiet the minds of the key people to ^{BOTH} ~~the~~ ⁱⁿ obtaining a modification of the Wilson Memorandum. This paper stated the reasons for permitting the Army to ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~Wilson Memorandum and critical of the order of Mr. Wilson that the Army would cease development of its Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile and concentrate on other missiles.~~ ^{continue development of} It is our contention that~~

nobody can accurately envision what the next war will be like; however, it is plain that the situation will be ^{IT} ~~a~~ much more fluid ~~one~~ than ^{IT} ~~has~~ ^{BEEN} existed in our past wars, and that the limits of the battlefield will be much harder to delineate than ^{THEY} ~~we~~ have been able to do in the past.

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Now, sir, to attempt to answer your question as to how your testimony would be relevant and material. It simply boils down to this fact: Colonel Nickerson was ^{VERY} ~~so~~ disturbed over the Wilson Memorandum and apparently did use some bad judgment in writing this paper critical of ~~Mr. Wilson's order~~ the reason he was disturbed was that as a professional soldier he felt that it was necessary to ^{take effective action} do something as quickly as possible to correct the situation. Therefore ~~it was~~ his motive in doing what he did ~~that~~ is going to be a key question in the trial. Your testimony will be relevant and material in this respect -- if you agree to the soundness of the concept which I have briefly outlined above, it will have great weight in showing that his motive was sound, however unwise the action that he took may have been. I am requesting your assistance because in my considered judgment and from experience I have never known, of ~~knowing~~ a more firm, forceful, and clear-sighted military leader. I say that from both personal observation and information obtained by reading and from other sources.

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