

WILLIAM SHELTON PRITHCARD
Frank Nelson Building
Birmingham, Ala.

January 7, 1958

C O P Y

Hon. Harry M. Ayers
Publisher
The Anniston Star
Anniston, Alabama

Dear Harry:

Thanks for your kind letter of January 4, reference the reinstatement of Colonel John C. Nickerson to his former position at Redstone Arsenal at Huntsville, Alabama.

As you may know, I am currently serving as a Civilian Aide to Hon. Wilbur M. Brucker, Secretary of the Army. On account of this fact, I followed closely the Nickerson case. During my tenure as Civilian Aide, I have been privileged to come to know Major General John Medaris and Major General H. N. Toftoy, each of whom I hold in the highest esteem. I have also come to know other Executive officers on duty at Redstone when the Nickerson incident occurred.

Because of our friendship, which I value very highly, our joint interest in the American Legion, your record as one of Alabama's most outstanding citizens and your splendid record for patriotism and public service, I feel free to state to you the following, which I believe to be the exact facts in the Nickerson case.

Colonel Nickerson was on duty at Redstone serving in grade as a Security officer. In this capacity, certain highly classified information came into his possession. He well knew that he was privileged to communicate this information only to persons who held security clearances which entitled them to know the contents of the classified documents in his possession.

Colonel Nickerson in violation of Army orders and the trust imposed in him of his own motion and without the knowledge of his superiors, called in a stenographer and dictated to her letters to certain newspaper and periodical writers, in which he disclosed highly classified information.

When the Court Martial case came on for trial, Nickerson was represented by able Counsel. Nickerson and his Attorneys realized the absolute truth of the facts herein stated. They knew that Nickerson had no defense against this aspect of his case. Accordingly, Nickerson's Counsel promptly began negotiations which contemplated a plea of guilty to this aspect of the charges and specifications brought against him. As you well know, Nickerson did enter a plea of guilty to the charge of having disclosed classified information to unauthorized persons.

I am sure that you will agree with me that a person holding the commission of Colonel in the United States Army who violates a trust of this character is not qualified to serve in a facility as highly restricted as is Redstone.

Further, from my acquaintances with General Medaris, I am absolutely convinced that he is not only a brilliant sincere man who has dedicated his life to the defense and security of America, but further he is a man who would never do anyone injustice. He testified at Nickerson's trial that he would not desire Nickerson longer under his command. Certainly a man who has accomplished what General Medaris

has for the defense of America should not be slapped in the face by our undertaking such a procedure as that indicated in your letter.

I write you thus frankly because I know your love for our Country, and your high and sincere desire to do no one an injustice.

When you are next in Birmingham, I trust I will have the privilege and pleasure of having lunch or dinner with you, that I might be privileged to answer for you any questions that you might have in mind concerning Colonel Nickerson and Redstone, to which I might know the answer.

With kindest personal regards and hoping to have the privilege and pleasure of seeing you soon, I am

Sincerely yours,

s/W. S. Pritchard

WSP:mla

C O P Y

C O P Y

January 10, 1958

Hon. William S. Pritchard
Frank Nelson Building
Birmingham, Alabama

Dear Bill:

Please accept my thanks for your good letter of January 7, which I am forwarding to General Almond for his information. Of course, knowing you as well as I do, I respect your point of view, but I do not believe that respect for tradition in every instance should dictate a disregard of superior ability.

Nickerson was sort of a Billy Mitchell, and I think his actions have been eminently justified in the light of recent violations as to our unpreparedness to meet Russian aggression.

My own opinion is that there is a considerable division in the command of General Medaris at Redstone with respect to Nickerson's being willing to sacrifice his own career in behalf of what he regarded as the defense of his country. It seems that Brucker also has been asleep at the switch, for he likely would have humiliated Gavin, it seems, had it not been for the overwhelming endorsement of Gavin's position by the Congress and the people of the country generally.

In fine, I think that Nickerson has been punished sufficiently, if punishment was necessitated, and that a man of his outstanding ability should not be lost to the service of his country merely to uphold high-brass tradition.

I do look forward to talking with you further about this matter the next time we have a chance to get together in Birmingham. In the meantime, you may be assured of my best regards.

Very sincerely,

H. M. Ayers

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