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ARMY "LEAK" PROBE

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AGITATES REDSTONE

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M/R Finds Allegedly Secret Information Is Widely Known

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HUNTSVILLE, Ala. -- The Army is grimly keeping its mouth shut about any and all details of the probe launched by the Pentagon into the "leak" of allegedly secret documents concerning the now-famous "Wilson Memorandum" reassigning the roles of the Army and the Air Force in the development and control of guided and ballistic missiles and rockets.

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But MISSILES & ROCKETS finds that much of the so-called secret information could have been gleaned by an astute reader in the columns of this magazine and other public sources. What this publication could not have predicted, however, was the inept political maneuvering by the Army in its first panic-stricken days following issuance of the Wilson Memorandum.

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Details of the sensationally successful 3,300-mile flight of the Army's Jupiter IRBM at an altitude of 650 miles in September from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to a point past Ascension Island in the South Atlantic were common knowledge at the December meeting of the American Rocket Society in New York, and this magazine summarized these reports in its January issue. Further details of the Jupiter flight and first data on the Air Force's competitive Thor were commented upon by widely syndicated military affairs writers. Any knowledgeable student of the field could accurately appraise and arrive at the results that were made public and at a lot of other data that could be surmised.

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In fact, hundreds of people here at Redstone Arsenal and the Army Ballistic Missile Agency have known for weeks most of the information, the release of which is now being subjected to an official probe with overtones of treason, courts-martial and worse. Despite

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missiles and rockets

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5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95
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the rigid and often ridiculous security measures that prevail - armed guards accompany visitors to wash rooms and soft drink machines - top secret information becomes known to the community through a process of mental osmosis and plain deduction. Among Huntsville's 52,000 residents are hundreds of top missile engineers and scientists, both at the Arsenal and ABMA as well as in the growing number of related private industries that supply parts and components to them. They are organized into chapters of most of the top professional societies, meet regularly and openly and, in addition, have fostered public discussions of the problems and progress in the missile field among the local citizenry down to the Boy Scout level. Thus the community's intimate knowledge of the nation's defense aims is perhaps more enlightened than some of the outer precincts of the Pentagon itself.

What the community does not understand, however, is the absurdly inept political blundering of top Army brass who, when caught out in the open in undercover work, are seemingly trying to pillory one of the area's most respected citizens, Col. John C. Nickerson, the only officer and, indeed, the only person to be named so far by official sources in the probe. The prevailing opinion is that Col. Nickerson is being made a scapegoat by persons very high up in the Army, perhaps from higher headquarters, who sought to take advantage of an expedient local situation to advance the political aims of their branch of the service.

Col. Nickerson, a West Point graduate of 1938, has been chief of the field coordination branch of the ABMA at Redstone for a year. His duties are to see that all goes well with the missiles that are being put into operational service with field units. He has not been in the public eye until now.

Here is a reconstruction of the events that catapulted Col. Nickerson into the limelight in the days following the publication of the Wilson Memorandum. They are authenticated by several prominent Huntsville citizens and leaders.

missiles and rockets

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1 First, top officials at Redstone and ABMA apparently had only about 24 hours notice
2 of the impending issuance of the memorandum. A sketchy press release expressed their belief
3 that there would be no reduction of employment at the 12,000-man installations nor cancelation
4 of some \$20,000,000 of new construction contracts that had just been let. (M/R, Dec. '56).
5 Several other statements along the same line appeared in the next few days, including one
6 by ABMA commander Maj. Gen. John B. Medaris to the effect that "we know who our customer is;
7 it is the Air Force."

8 That there was no detailed advance knowledge of the Wilson Memorandum is demonstrated
9 by the somewhat ludicrous manner in which the first full text of the document was received
10 here. A copy of that morning's New York Times which carried the full text was given to an
11 aide who met an incoming plane from the East at the commercial airport and obtained a copy
12 of the newspaper from an obliging airlines stewardess. This was how one of the nation's
13 most vital defense installations obtained its first "official" knowledge of an order of
14 paramount importance to its well-being.

15 Within a very short while, there began to appear in the offices of prominent local
16 leaders copies of a well-written and nicely printed brochure of perhaps 50 or 60 pages. One
17 person who saw it said it bore the caption: "Considerations on the Wilson Memorandum" and was
18 not marked "Top Secret" or "Secret" or even "Confidential." Those who will admit to having
19 read it said it contained, among other things, two sections headed: "What the Army Knows
20 About Long Range Missiles" and "What the Air Force Doesn't Know About Long Range Missiles."
21 All agree that it was a well-written, well-reasoned, well-printed booklet reflecting careful
22 and lengthy preparation in the presentation of the background of Army missile and rocket
23 development and citing numerous historic references as far back as the wars of ancient China.

24 It is also said to have contained sharp personal references to the alleged
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"anti-Army" attitude of Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and some details of Pentagon meetings held several months earlier in the year.

It is still a matter of conjecture that such a carefully prepared and cogently written booklet could have been hastily whipped together here by persons who are not professional writers and who could have no access to discussions in Washington on the Joint Chiefs of Staff level.

At this point occurred an entirely fortuitous event. As part of its long range program to attract new industries into the area, the City of Huntsville and its civic organizations set up a welcome for officials of the Norton Company, abrasives and metal treating firm, who were opening their new plant here. A tour of the Norton plant at Hobbs Island on the Tennessee River and a visit to the Redstone Arsenal - the usual unclassified visitors tour - was arranged. However, two U.S. Senators and five Congressmen accepted invitations to the affair. For these distinguished guests, Redstone prepared a special tour and demonstration of highly secret equipment, to which the standing of the guests clearly entitled them. It is reported that copies of the controversial brochure were distributed to these guests at a special briefing, and that has been confirmed by one Senator who asked that his name not be used, although his prominence in military affairs would certainly warrant his having access to most of the nation's top secrets. There can be no doubt that the Army told its full side of the missile controversy at the special briefing.

Therefore, Huntsville's leaders have concluded that this whole affair, now involving the career of a hard-working, technically brilliant officer must have been planned elsewhere and concurred in elsewhere. It is pointed out that there are many higher-ranking officers at Redstone and ABMA than Col. Nickerson, and that an officer who has enjoyed his eagles

missiles and rockets

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for only two years could not have prepared or released such information in such detail -
and would not have done so in light of his West Point training - unless there had been
agreement, open or tacit, from on high, or unless he were ordered to make it available -
if, indeed, it was he who made it available.

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