Death of the B-1: The Events Behind Carter's Decision

The B-1 strategic bomber would have been one of the costliest weapons ever built, and Jimmy Carter's cancellation of it on 30 June was a decision of great moment. Yet, though the decision was his alone, others created the opportunity for him to make it. Without their efforts, which succeeded against all odds, the B-1 would almost certainly still be flying, whether Carter wanted it or not.

"Once in a while you see these storybook endings, but the ending always clouds over the events that made it possible," says a Senate aide who opposed the plane. One major element in the story of the B-1's demise was a remarkable, Quaker-inspired campaign which chose the plane as its target as early as 1973. Another was a roller coaster of a legislative battle fought out last year in the Senate from May through August. Last of the battle's many surprises came in its final result: the B-1's supporters considered the outcome a victory, but it held the seeds of their cause's annihilation.

By the time of its demise, the price of the B-1 had ascended to more than $100 million a plane, and the full fleet, with its tankers and missiles, could have cost some $90 billion over the next 10 years. Despite the sky-high expense, which became the natural centerpiece of the opponents' campaign, the B-1 was no sitting duck. The Air Force was totally committed to the plane. Rockwell International, the prime contractor, had chosen subcontractors in 47 states, facing almost every congressman who might vote against the plane with the prospect of loss of jobs in his district. In both House and Senate the plane was strongly supported, and motions to cancel it went down to regular defeat.

For decision-makers, well-inured to the high cost of defense, the price of the B-1 was less important than its utility. From Secretary of Defense Harold Brown downward, there are few strategic analysts who do not believe that manned bombers of some kind are essential to national defense. The B-1, a terrain-skimming variable geometry plane with a high bombload capacity, low radar profile, and quick take-off ability, is a formidable weapon. Its proponents had many reasons to be confident that it would be built.

One strand in the B-1's undoing begins in Germantown, Ohio. The American Friends Service Committee, the Quaker-founded pacifist group, held a convocation of peace organizations there in October 1973. The meeting decided to mount a national campaign against the B-1 for a miscellany of reasons—partly in order to continue the strength of the anti-war movement, partly because of the devastation caused by B-52's in Vietnam, partly through desire to expose the role of corporations in promoting weapons systems.

Terry Provance, chief organizer of the Quaker group, set about establishing local anti–B-1 groups throughout the country. By the time he had finished, 4 years later, his network included more than 1000 local organizers, some 50 campaign offices throughout the nation, and 50 full-time staffers. The network held vigils outside IRS offices on tax days and mounted nationwide demonstrations on special occasions, such as the rollout of the B-1, and the day of Carter's inauguration.

To establish a presence in Washington, Provance put together a diverse coalition of some 34 church, peace, labor, and environmental groups. Known as the National Campaign to Stop the B-1 Bomber, the coalition orchestrated grass roots pressure, and was capable of inundating key congressmen with hundreds of constituent letters urging them to oppose the B-1.

Senator John Culver

Perhaps the most important achievement of the network and the coalition was to make the B-1 an issue in the presidential campaign. "Without their efforts, it is very unlikely that the B-1 would have been an issue, and in that sense they performed a very important function," says Clark McFadden, until recently counsel to the Senate Armed Services Committee. "They got Carter to take a stand on the B-1 when he knew very little about it, and got him involved in a way that otherwise would not have happened."

The coalition's high moment came in the statement made by candidate Carter to the Democratic Platform Committee on 12 June 1976: "The B-1 is an example of a proposed system which should not be funded and would be wasteful of taxpayers' dollars." Carter soon edged back from this unequivocal position, saying that he didn't "at this point" favor construction of the B-1. His position might have gone the usual way of campaign promises (it wasn't included in the post-election "promise book," perhaps because his staff did not regard it as such) but for another event that served to force a decision on the B-1, the plane's perils-of-Pauline progress through the Congress.

The coalition against the B-1 had always believed that its cause would win or lose in the House of Representatives in the spring 1976 votes on the plane's production funds. In fact, the plane's fate was determined primarily in the Senate, and the man who forged the instrument of its death was Democrat John Culver of Iowa.

A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Culver is said to be the only one of its three liberal freshmen who dares stand up to chairman John Stennis. At a committee meeting on 13 May 1976, Culver proposed to delay funding of the bomber until February 1977 so that the next president, whoever he might be, could make the production decision. Culver's amendment lost, but received enough support in the somewhat conservative committee to suggest that it had a chance of winning on the Senate floor.

In fact, a head count showed he might get as many as 50 or 51 votes from a full Senate, but many senators were out of town and it was clear that choice of the right day was crucial to passage of his

amendment. Monitoring their forces closely, the staff aides whose senators opposed the B-1 decided that May 20 seemed the best day for a vote. Republicans John Tower and Barry Goldwater agreed to the date, "Either because they didn't know their people or because they were overconfident," says an anti–B-1 aide.

Having got their date, the opponents of the plane arranged for George McGovern first to offer an amendment deleting all funds for B-1 production. The amendment would lose, but the Culver amendment would seem a compromise by comparison. The plan worked: McGovern's amendment was rejected by 33 votes to 48, Culver's was narrowly accepted by 44 to 37.

A notable factor in the 20 May vote was a petition organized by the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) in which 19 former officials of the defense community declared that the B-1 bomber was not worth the cost. The signatories of the FAS petition included Clark Clifford, former Secretary of Defense, and McGeorge Bundy, Johnson's assistant for national security affairs. "That statement was very important," says a staff aide who opposed the B-1, "because it postured us as sound and responsible and not just knee-jerk leftists." The statement was issued for release on 17 May, yet not a single newspaper mentioned it. One of the signatories, former CIA science director Pete Scoville, grumbled of the neglect to NBC reporter Marilyn Berger. Seeing a scoop, Berger reported the statement on the NBC evening news of 18 May, adding the surprising observation that, for the first time, the B-1 seemed to be in trouble in the Senate. FAS director Jeremy Stone believes Berger's report became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Calling his signatories the "NBC-19," he wrote them after Carter's decision that "never have so few saved so much for so many."

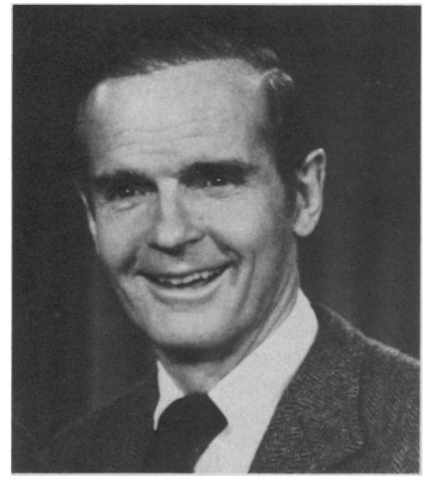
Passage of the Culver amendment on May 20 was the B-1 opponents' first clear victory, but the triumph was short lived. Ohio Republican Robert Taft was one of the B-1 supporters who was out of town when the vote was called. Returning in a fury to Washington, he offered a motion which in effect would have nullified the Culver amendment. This time it was the plane's opponents who were out of town: McGovern and six other senators had gone to London to collect a Bicentennial copy of the Magna Carta.

Knowing he no longer had the votes, Culver threatened to filibuster the Taft amendment. Taft gave a long, dull speech while the powers in the Senate pondered what to do; their decision was to table the amendment. But as they perhaps foresaw, this fair play did not cost them the game. In the conference to reconcile House and Senate differences, the House conferees were solid for the B-1, the Senate conferees were split, and the Culver amendment was dropped.

Opponents of the B-1 distributed more than 3 million copies of this dollar bill during the course of their campaign. The total cost of the program, some $50 billion at the start of the campaign, had risen to $90 billion by 1976.

The defense budget goes through both houses of Congress twice, the first stage being known as the authorization of funds, the second as appropriation. Culver's amendment was attached to the authorization bill. Wisconsin Democrat William Proxmire, a critic of the B-1 since 1969, took up the delay amendment in the appropriations cycle by proposing it at a meeting of the Senate appropriations committee on 21 July. With unusually full attendance, the vote tied at 14 to 14. Proxmire asked the members to wait while he found Robert Byrd, a senator who is usually a strong supporter of defense spending. Byrd was brought to the committee room and broke the tie—in Proxmire's favor.

Supporters of the B-1 chose not to fight the Proxmire/Culver amendment on the Senate floor. One reason was a probable lack of votes. "We couldn't get rid of the Culver amendment in the Senate, we could only get rid of it in conference," says a pro–B-1 staff aide. But this time the stratagem was only half successful. Conferees from the appropriations committees of both houses tend to be less conservative than those from the armed services committees which oversee the authorization process. The House conferees accepted the Proxmire amendment to delay a full production decision until February 1977. But they insisted on a compromise that spending could nevertheless begin on a month-to-month basis. Supporters were happy with the decision because it meant, if the next president approved the plane, that not a day would have been lost in its production.



Senator William Proxmire

What they failed to foresee was the influence of the delay amendment in focusing public attention on how the new president would handle the B-1 issue. "We forced a deadline and a decision on him," says a Senate staffer who opposed the plane. An aide for the other side agrees: "The amendment kept the focus on the issue. With all the networks standing by, it made the decision look like a great dramatic moment in history." Without the delay amendment, the Air Force would have committed all $1 billion of the appropriation instead of spending it pro rata on a monthly basis. More importantly, the B-1 would have been just another item in the budget bequeathed by the Ford Administration and would not have required Carter's special attention.

The Air Force awarded Rockwell International the contract to start production of the B-1 in December 1976, by which time it was known that Ford, a strong supporter of the plane, would not be the next president. Fearing that Carter might make the wrong decision if

forced to do so after only a week in office, the Air Force extended the month-by-month funding process from February through the end of June.

If the height of cleverness is to be able to conceal it, the same is true of political skill. Carter's White House was evidently the first to perceive that the strong political passions on either side of the B-1 issue could be largely defused by a combination of curtailing the B-1 and endorsing the cruise missile. Within this framework, Carter was free to concentrate on the technical issues, and his aides to portray the decision as managerial, not political, in nature.

In preparing for his decision, Carter is reported to have read an influential Brookings Institution study on the B-1 prepared by two former Air Force colonels, Alton H. Quanbeck and Archie L. Wood. Using a systems analysis approach, they concluded, just as would Carter, that "We see no reason to make a commitment to produce the B-1," and that modernized B-52's equipped with cruise missiles should be considered as an alternative.

Another major influence is said to have been the advice received from Secretary of Defense Harold Brown. Before the decision Brown had made several statements on the B-1, all of them equivocal. In April 1976, when still president of Caltech, Brown declined to sign the FAS petition stating that the B-1 was not worth the cost. "Sorry, your draft statement on the B-1 doesn't represent my views," Brown wrote the FAS. "Neither does the opposite, which others have asked me to say. In the end, I suppose I may have to make up my own statement." Brown wrote shortly afterward to Proxmire, saying that he had read the Quanbeck-Wood study and a Defense Department analysis known as the Joint Strategic Bomber Study and had found that the Defense Department "has the best of argument in terms of accuracy, clarity of assumptions, and defensibility of conclusions."

It is not known what advice Brown gave Carter, but after the decision the Defense Secretary explained he had re-

Briefing

Press Meets the Press

The President's science adviser met reporters recently in what invited description as a frank Frank Press press briefing. The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), which Press heads, had just come through the reorganization of the Executive Office of the President virtually unscathed (*Science*, 29 July). Press and his office were, so to speak, off probation and, in his first general meeting with the science reporters, he made it clear that he feels on comfortable terms with the President and, what is probably equally important, with other senior White House staff members.

A major matter of interest to scientists and engineers who are White House watchers has been how the science adviser himself elicits advice from the scientific community. For a decade, the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC), made up primarily of industry and university scientific all-stars, provided the inputs. Then PSAC antagonized President Nixon with what he regarded as gratuitous advice, and in 1972 science was temporarily dispossessed from the White House.

Now, since OSTP acquired not only a new legal lease on life under President Ford but also the seal of approval from the Carter Administration, the question of outside advisers comes up again. Press ruled out a restoration of PSAC, at least in the foreseeable future. Alluding to the President's dislike of permanent advisory committees, Press said he was "not going to establish a PSAC-type operation [now], nor is my intention to do so in the near term."

OSTP, however, is using outside advisers and will continue to do so, said Press, calling such panels "the guts of the office." The new pattern will be, however, that consultants will be enlisted to work on specific projects and, in most cases, will stop being consultants when the projects are completed.

Press said that OSTP and its consultants have been involved in a number of projects, most of them in the national security area, but noted that the office's purview is "broadening out." Responding to questions he said that his office had not been involved in the decision on production of the neutron bomb. He added that he had been "fully briefed" but did not contribute to the President's decision against production of the B-1 bomber. Press said he had, however, been invited to participate in weapons systems evaluations and in discussions about the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). Press is an earth scientist with bona fides as an expert on nuclear test verification problems.

While no permanent advisory structure is in the offing, Press has named two former colleagues on the M.I.T. faculty as "senior consultants." Jack Ruina, a faculty member and administrator at M.I.T., has had extensive experience both as a government official and adviser on military R & D and arms control matters. He will advise Press on national security and technology transfer issues. Eugene B. Skolnikoff, a political scientist and director of the Center for International Studies at M.I.T., who also has had considerable Washington experience, will advise mainly on international science and technology. Both will serve part-time. They too will be concerned with particular projects and there is no intention of building a sort of poor man's PSAC.—J.W.

Science Finally Admitted to Congressional Press Gallery

Science has finally made it into Congress.

This periodical—after many years of being excluded from the periodical press galleries of the House and Senate—has been granted a waiver from gallery rules so that its reporters can obtain congressional press cards.

Science and other publications such as *Science News* and *Chemical and Engineering News* have been kept out of the gallery as a result of a rule against publications of nonprofit organizations—the assumption being that these publications engage in lobbying. The AAAS, which does not lobby, therefore has been grouped with such organizations as the National Rifle Association, which do.

Common sense did not prove sufficient to resolve the issue, but after a year of complex hagglings, the untiring efforts of News & Comment writer Luther Carter, and finally, intercession by Senator Lee Metcalf (D–Mont.), the impasse has been broken.

Now *Science* has the same privileges long accorded such publications as *Oil and Gas Journal* and *Modern Tire Dealer*.—C.H.

viewed the situation since taking office and had been impressed with the improvement in cruise missile technology. "On balance, although either the B-1 or the combination of cruise missiles with B-52's or other aircraft would be effective, the cruise missile options offer more certainty of high effectiveness," Brown concluded.

Of the many postmortems on the decision, the most interesting came from the losers, who tended to blame their own side for not having pressed their case harder. "Our complaint is not against the coalition but against those who sat and watched," says John M. Fisher, president of the defense-oriented American Security Council. *Aviation Week*, a relentless ally of Air Force causes, chided the Air Force for having "done a miserable job over the years making its case for the B-1 and pushing the pace and funding of the program beyond its genuine needs." The editorial also blamed Rockwell for not lobbying harder: Rockwell "should serve as a good example of where a low profile leads in the defense business."

Rockwell did keep a low profile in recent months, perhaps because the decision seemed in the bag. But the company had actively pursued its interests before that. To counter the mail stimulated by the coalition, Rockwell had its contractors give pencil, paper, and company time to their work force to write letters to their congressmen supporting the B-1. Senator Culver received letters from Collins Radio, a Rockwell subsidiary which is the largest employer in Iowa, but a substantial minority of the writers confessed that they were sympathetic to his cause.

The B-1's opponents had fewer resources than Rockwell, and there were times when the coalition ran out of money altogether. Its three full-time organizers, Robert Brammer, Steven Pearlman, and Craig Stevens, worked on a shoestring and sometimes less. "If you ever want to see a David and Goliath story, it was the campaign," says a Senate aide who opposed the B-1. "Here you have a bunch of young kids who worked for peanuts and had to struggle for every dime. On the other side you had North American Rockwell, which spent thousands of dollars on lobbying, with the entire support of the Air Force and its formidable direct and indirect lobbying methods."

The influence of the two sides' lobbying in Congress is hard to assess. Aides say that in the Senate probably few votes were affected either way. But Brammer believes that many votes in Congress, particularly in the House, were swayed by the intense grass roots pressure generated by the coalition and its network in the form of constituent visits, phone calls, and letters. Whatever the number of votes influenced, the coalition certainly succeeded in making the B-1 an issue in Congress. "With a complex system such as the B-1 you have to do a tremendous amount of work before it becomes an issue. You have to create a certain environment which will encourage politicians to take an interest," observes a Senate aide.

Members of the coalition believe that Carter would not have canceled the B-1 had not their campaign created the political support for the decision. "I don't think Carter would have considered cutting the plane unless he had thought it was politically possible in the Congress and the country, and I don't think that opposition to the B-1 would have generated itself without the campaign," says Michael Mann of the FAS.

This judgment has some support from other observers. "There is no way you can fail to give the coalition a lot of credit for what happened," remarks Dale Tahtinen, a defense analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "You wouldn't have had that kind of opposition in Congress if they hadn't got people in an uproar and made it an issue, nor would Congress have held the decision for the next president, who had to think back over the campaign commitment he had made."

Clark McFadden, Stennis's counsel, gives a similar verdict: "It was clear that the House and Senate were basically in favor of going ahead with the plane. The only reed the opponents had was to get a delay. The fact that they were able to leave the thing open was a major victory. And the fact that Congress reserved that decision for Carter was very important. Absent quite a strenuous effort, this decision would have been made and resolved in the Ford Administration."

—NICHOLAS WADE

Peter Bourne: Psychiatrist in the White House

One winter Sunday in 1975 Peter Bourne and his wife Mary King were telling a couple of breakfast visitors about Jimmy Carter, then a faceless member of the Democratic pack. Carter, said Bourne, was the "ideal" candidate. In addition to being brainy, competent, dedicated, and compassionate, said Bourne, a psychiatrist, he was "together," had Kennedy-like charisma, and a happy marriage. On top of that, said Bourne, who knows how to tailor his pitch to the interests of his listeners (in this case, literary ones), Carter was a devoted reader of poet Dylan Thomas. Bourne went on to say Carter would enter all the primaries, win most of them, take the Democratic convention on the first ballot, and go on to beat Jerry Ford.

And so this bold prophecy came to pass, and it came to pass also that Bourne is now sitting in the White House as the President's special assistant for health (a block away from his wife, who is now deputy director of Action).

All politicians are professional optimists about themselves, but Bourne's sense of assurance about the way he sees the world comes as close as that of anyone in the President's retinue to matching the confidence of Carter himself—who has often been quoted as saying he was sure he could achieve the presidency from the moment he decided to make the run.

Carter's victory and method of achieving it came as no surprise to Bourne, who laid out the general course Carter subsequently followed, in a "how you can win" memo addressed to the then-governor of Georgia in July 1972. Although Bourne is by no means the only individual who can claim credit for the campaign strategy, its success is a tribute to his canny political sensitivities and his knack for being at the right place at the right time.

Now cosily established in the basement of the White House, the 37-year-