

The AEC: Notes from Inside

Forging the Atomic Shield. Excerpts from the Office Diary of Gordon E. Dean. ROGER M. ANDERS, Ed. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1987. xxxii, 309 pp. \$27.95.

President Truman's second term, January 1949 to January 1953, was a watershed in the evolution of U.S. nuclear policy. Those years witnessed a dramatic series of policy decisions in the nuclear field, and the edited office diary of Gordon Dean provides an important historical source for studying their origins and implications. A former law partner of Senator Brien McMahon, who was chairman of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee, Dean joined the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in May 1949 and as chairman from July 1950 to June 1953 contributed to an era that "marked a break from a scarcity of atomic weapons and movement toward the atomic plenty of the 1960s and later" (p. 24). Dean's secretary recorded and summarized his office telephone calls during Dean's AEC membership, and Anders has gathered them here, along with various aide-memoire, to reveal the views and management style of a significant participant in nuclear policy-making. These are not the musings and inner thoughts of reflective man; they are the jottings and matter-of-fact policy reflections of a busy administrator.

Anders does a first-rate editorial job. He provides an excellent overview of context and central themes in a 30-page opening essay. He introduces carefully each of the book's six chapters; indeed, the thoroughness of his prefatory summaries sometimes renders anticlimactic the reading of the diary entries themselves. Anders also retains balance in his commentary. He praises Dean's political and administrative skill as AEC chairman without suspending critical judgment on Dean's policy positions. Anders notes, for example, Dean's simple-minded anti-communism, his general disregard of radiation hazards from nuclear testing, and his lack of concern over how his views might have contributed to the nuclear arms race.

Dean became AEC chairman at the beginning of the Korean war, and his first year, detailed in chapters 2 and 3, proved the most strenuous of the 4-year term. The outbreak of the war stunned Washington and the Truman White House. As one con-

sequence, Dean supported a huge expansion of uranium and plutonium facilities for weapons production, including a new gaseous diffusion plant and an additional three reactors, totalling \$1.4 billion and equal in cost to all facilities erected by the Manhattan Engineer District during World War II. He also championed continental nuclear testing to advance fission weapons programs, which Truman approved in October 1950, with tests inaugurated in early 1951. And he supported Edward Teller's campaign for the thermonuclear program. Lesser policy issues also clamored for attention, such as what details to reveal in court about the atomic bomb during the Rosenberg trial. But it is the policy debates over testing and weapons development, not spies or security issues, about which the diary is most revealing.

The book is for the specialist, not the general reader, and among the various bits of information close readers will find intriguing is the claim that intelligence reached Truman in April 1951 that the Soviets would enter the war and combine with the Chinese to drive the U.S.-United Nations forces out of Korea. "For the next few weeks," according to Anders, "President Truman and his advisers had to consider whether World War III was imminent" (p. 107). The first reaction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the news was to demand immediate transfer of nine complete atomic bombs to the Air Force. Dean, with official, civilian responsibility for the stockpile, urged a National Security Council discussion before any decision, but Truman took independent action. These are the kinds of issues on which the diary is most useful.

The diary also explores the question of tactical nuclear weapons, the central topic of chapter 4 and a major preoccupation for Dean during the June 1951-January 1952 period. Dean drew no distinction between conventional weapons and tactical nukes and favored their use in Korea. The book also describes elements of a second major expansion in the nuclear program authorized in January 1952 and offers information on Edward Teller's successful struggle, over Dean's objections, for a second laboratory for weapons testing, established eventually at Livermore, California.

The diary's significance wanes as the Eisenhower forces come into Washington, af-

ter the Republican election victory of 1952. We observe Dean defending his agency against budget cuts and making ready to enter private industry, first at the investment firm of Lehman Brothers and ultimately as a vice-president of General Dynamics Corporation, a major defense contractor. Unfortunately, Dean's life was cut short by a plane crash in 1958. In the meantime he had been present at the creation of America's nuclear arsenal, and, according to this diary at least, without any doubt as to the aptness of his handiwork.

ROBERT CUFF
Founders College,
York University,
North York,
Ontario M3J 1P3,
Canada

A Chronicle of Medicine

The Changing Humors of Portsmouth. The Medical Biography of an American Town, 1623-1983. J. WORTH ESTES and DAVID M. GOODMAN. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, 1986 (distributor, Science History Publications, Canton, MA). xviii, 363 pp., illus. \$19.95.

A physician and a historian have teamed up to write this medical history or, as they call it, medical biography, of a New England town, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, over 360 years. They focus most particularly on the medical practitioners and medical institutions in the town, following physicians and hospitals through the years. They do not analyze the health care experiences of patients, nor do they try to present a composite picture of diseases or of changing medical problems over time. The context in which medicine was practiced and hospitals were developed and run is an important theme in the book, and so medical public relations as revealed in the local newspapers becomes a significant part of this story.

The authors believe that medical history has suffered from a lack of specific archival data collection, and this book is an attempt to address that need by providing detailed local data over a long period of time. To a great extent the authors are successful in the attempt, and thus Portsmouth becomes significant to a broader audience as a case study of how professional organization, relations between physicians and community, the rise of hospitals, their staffing, administration, and financing, and the role of auxiliary personnel actually unfolded. Particularly when they concentrate on the history of the Portsmouth Hospital do the authors reveal important changes over time and show how