

# Fresh Approach Felt Essential To Curb Plane Building Delays

## Central Authority, On-Spot Decisions In Recommendations

(This is the first of a series of six articles documenting a serious study in military aircraft production which imperils national security.)

**By ROBERT S. BIRD and TOM LAMBERT**  
New York Herald Tribune News Service

Washington—Can anything be done to end the delays that imperil today this country's production of modern warplanes?

The aircraft industry says yes—a great deal.

But not, its leaders warn, by creating more "study committees" in Washington, and by accumulating more voluminous Pentagon reports and paucily-worded "directives" on the subject.

The plane-makers insist that a fresh approach is essential. And that the point of attack must be on Pentagon and Air Force "decision," red tape and "paper work." They say the axe must be used.

A number of high-ranking officers in the Pentagon have agreed with the industry men in off-the-record conversations. The three by-products of bureaucracy—indecision, red tape and excessive paper work—are by far the biggest causes of delays in the military aircraft program, according to industry executives in all three major branches, airplanes, electronics systems and jet engines.

**Chief Recommendations**

They give their views in interviews from the East to the West Coast during a six-week survey into delays in the design, development and production of critically needed war planes.

Their chief recommendations—in which there was virtually unanimous agreement among them—are as follows:

1. Centralize decision-making authority within the Pentagon and Air Force to insure action in place of present delays. This involves slashing through the multiplicity of committees and study groups which now hold a great deal of responsibility but little authority for originating and accelerating programs.
2. Assign to each aircraft project—or their company working on it—an officer with the power to make on-the-spot decisions on all but basic policy and budget questions. This would end much of the present buck-passing and delays in the lower-echelon supervision of manufacturing processes. But it would leave major design and cost decisions to the proposed stream-lined decision center in Washington.
3. Have the Air Force limit itself largely to the "what" of aircraft design objectives and allow the manufacturers more freedom to devise the "how" of making the planes to these specified objectives.
4. Must Have Freedom

As it is, the industry says, the Air Force not only establishes "what" it wants in the plane but interferes with time-wasting red tape killing the manufacturer "how" to make it.

The performance requirements for today's planes already push beyond technological "know-how," the plane-makers say, and they must have freedom to work out "how" of manufacture without petty intrusion from official groups who often are unequipped to advise them.

4. Top Pentagon and Air Force authority should rigorously guard their own improved procedures from infiltration from the "creeping bureaucracy" of their lower echelons. Specifically, they say that new warplane procurement policies designed to speed up plane production, though put into effect with good results, are now threatened with impairment by the subtle efforts of lower echelon agencies to claim supervisory jurisdiction, adding more red tape.
5. Have the Pentagon and Air Force institute within the industry continuous research and development effort to assure for aircraft programs constant scientific advances into new realms of technology. In the past, such research and development has been slow and uneven. Inter-industry near-independence were followed by "holier-and-yell" peaks of urgency, which in turn tapered off again.
6. Allow industry to help supplement the nation's intelligence effort by showing what and where to look for technological information about the potential

enemy. And then let industry help the intelligence agencies evaluate this. Industry leaders say that intelligence agencies are overlooking source material which could vitally help it obtain a picture of the nature of the potential enemy's advanced technological programs or direction of activity. At a time when technological breakthroughs might tip the balance of power, they say, this becomes a vital matter.

The industry has various other suggestions to offer, but the above embody the main points for first action toward yielding most effective results in cutting down "lead time" for new war-planes.

Blame for the three major faults of indecision, red tape and unnecessary paper work was generally ascribed by industry executives to the rapidity with which the Air Force has expanded during its comparatively brief existence as a separate service, and to the inherent bureaucracy of the military system.

Many industry men pointed out, however, that the same bureaucratic evils are always intruding into their own industries as these grow larger, but industry has learned to cope with them. This is done, they emphasized, by the same method they urge for the Pentagon and Air Force: that is, by centralizing authority at the top and then delegating it to the right places down the line.

The industry is not alone in criticizing the Pentagon and the Air Force for indecision, red tape and oceans of paper work. Many persons in positions of responsibility in these official areas share industry's opinion and would, they have indicated, welcome reforms.

Secretary of the Air Force Donald Quarles was asked about the industry complaints, and discussing the point made on insufficient delegation of authority to override red tape, he said that was "maybe valid."

Unbounded Power Lacking

But, he added, the Air Force does not have unbounded power to delegate authority, since it has to be guided by the Defense Department and Congress "in the framework of the international scene."

Quarles also said that the Air Force does not have in its ranks as many "czars" as the aircraft industry seems to want in decision-making positions. (One manufacturer pointed out in reply that the Air Force has installed as head of its intercontinental ballistic missile program Maj. Gen. Ben Schriever who has wide decision-making power of the very kind urged by the aircraft industry. The same thing could be done, the manufacturer said, with the larger aircraft projects.)

Quarles seemed less concerned about the lead time in making aircraft than in the quality of such planes when they are organized in combat units.

"The real criteria is if we get it (an airplane) out in proper phase to modernize our operational forces and if it is modern enough to stay so until it is replaced," he asserted.

Thomas K. Finletter, who was Secretary of the Air Force from 1950 to 1953, said that aircraft lead time is no new problem—"it was an issue I was constantly working on."

Finletter said that the Air Force kept "a close check on all aircraft programs" to carry out its responsibility to Congress but expressed the belief that the lead time "situation could be improved." However, like Quarles, he indicated doubt if "giving a blank check" to aircraft manufacturers would solve all lead time problems.

A Defense Department spokesman gave assurances that the problem is regarded in the Pentagon and Air Force as a "very serious issue."

This official cited as one effort made by the department to reduce aircraft lead time a study undertaken in September, 1955, by a group headed by Undersecretary of Defense Reuben B. Robertson Jr.

The Robertson group studied the problem for about a year, he

said, interviewing more than 600 officials of the Department of Defense and executives of about 30 aircraft manufacturing and research organizations. In August of this year it made its findings to Secretary of Defense Wilson.

About six weeks later some 29 proposals taken from the report were briefly digested and sent to the manufacturers for their information.

These included suggestions for more concentrated Pentagon and Air Force attention to the operational requirements of the country's air arms, intensified by policy review of requirements for new weapons and more attention by the policy-makers to long lead time in technical programs.

Also there were suggestions to improve and heighten the stature, prestige and authority of officers assigned to aircraft projects, and to consider extending the duty tours of such officers so they would not be ordered off to other assignments just as they were becoming familiar with the programs.

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