

DIARIES OF JAMES V FORRESTAL, 1944-1949

Complete and unexpurgated diaries from the Seeley G Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University

Contents listing

[PUBLISHER'S NOTE](#)

[EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION](#)

[TECHNICAL NOTE](#)

[CONTENTS OF REELS](#)

Publisher's Note

"The full version of the Forrestal Diaries is a wonderful source - extraordinarily rich, and far more revealing than the edited version that was published in 1951."

Professor Marc Trachtenberg

Department of Political Science, UCLA

This microfilm project makes available for the first time the complete and unexpurgated version of Forrestal's manuscript and typescript diaries covering the period March 1944 to March 1949. While the printed edition, *The Forrestal Diaries*, edited by Walter Millis with the collaboration of E. S. Duffield in 1951, runs to some 555 pages plus index, there are nearly 3000 pages of diary entries, mostly in typescript format which we are now able to reproduce in full.

Who was Forrestal and why was he important? As Secretary of the Navy, 1944-1947, and first Secretary of Defense, 1947-1949, he had significant access to the President and was part of a State Department team with crucial responsibilities for running the war effort, ensuring a successful outcome for the Allies and, moreover, with a key role in considering and shaping the peace, reconstruction policies and the structure of the post-war world. Forrestal's background was of a businessman of considerable wealth, power, and position. In 1938 he had succeeded Clarence Dillon as President of Dillon Read. An efficient operator with a quietly driving ambition, he had risen relatively early to the top aged forty-six. Two years later he abandoned this career for good to enter the Roosevelt administration as one of FDR's special administrative assistants.

On 5 August 1940 the President nominated Forrestal to fill the position of Under Secretary of the Navy and he worked closely with Frank Knox (Secretary of the Navy) and Henry L. Stimson (Secretary of War). He was well suited to the colossal tasks of wartime procurement and logistics as well as the expansion of the Navy Department.

The diary notes reproduced here start when Forrestal took over as Secretary of the Navy on Knox's death in 1944 and continue through to Forrestal's resignation as Secretary of Defense in March 1949.

The diaries provide insights into many important questions:

- Pearl Harbor
- strategy for the War in the Pacific
- Yalta and post-war planning
- Discussions with the Soviet Union
- the strategic bombing of Japan and the use of the atomic bomb
- plans for the surrender, occupation and future of Japan
- reconversion of the American economy to a civilian footing
- the post war international situation in China and in the Middle East
- Allied Control of Germany and reconstruction policies in Europe
- the Marshall Plan
- The IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Frequent meetings and discussions with Henry L. Stimson (Secretary of War), Joseph C. Grew (Acting Secretary of State), John L. McCloy (Assistant Secretary of War), the President and the Secretary of State are recorded in Forrestal's diary notes. Some folders include extra background memoranda relevant to the diary entries - especially with regard to important meetings or providing Forrestal's own thoughts on particular topics.

The diary starts in earnest with Forrestal's trip to the Mediterranean, 4-23 August 1944, describing the visit to General Clark's Headquarters near Cecina, the allied invasion of southern France (15 August 1944), Forrestal's meeting with General Charles de Gaulle (18 August 1944) and an attached 5 page memorandum with Forrestal's comments and recollections of the conversation, followed by his return to the United States for meetings to discuss the post-war control of Germany (25 August) and a State Department Conference (29 August 1944) with Secretaries Hull, Patterson and McCloy.

Part of the entry for 25 August 1944 reads as follows:

Control of Germany

"...The Secretary of War pointed out that among other things Germany was a highly industrialized nation, that it would be a practical impossibility to shift large segments of the population who depended for their existence on industrial economy back to the land; furthermore, he pointed out that the products of German industry and business were needed for the rebuilding of Europe, particularly the iron and steel from the Ruhr."

Pages 9-13 contain Forrestal's early notes on the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (31 July 1944); on page 11 he observes:

"...The Fund, in effect, is merely a shock absorber. It can neither make rough roads smooth nor compensate for reckless driving. None of the delegates at Bretton Woods believed that it would solve the problems of getting payment for US goods if the US was to export goods while it blocks imports by high tariffs. But believing that the roads are certain to be rough, the delegates felt there was all the more need for shock absorbers - to save the whole world from being jarred by every thank-you-ma'am that each nation hits..."

Discussions with General MacArthur about the attack on Luzon are recorded on 26 September 1944. There are also many notes relating to the special enquiry on the attack on Pearl Harbor. On 14 November 1944 Forrestal summarises some of the main points:

1. Failure to use telephone.
2. So-called unity of command at Oahu - failure to hold daily meetings even during days of rising tension.
3. Failure to evaluate lessons already learned - the Taranto attack, British experience with aircraft torpedo attacks.
4. Submersion of CNO in details of material to the extent that he became insensitive to the significance of events.
5. General skepticism throughout the Navy that an air attack by the Japanese on Pearl was within their capabilities.

On the other side, I am impressed by the following:

1. Usual advantage of hindsight and the difficulty in reconstructing a state of mind which affected the entire country, Washington as well as Honolulu.
2. The fact that this war has proved that any carrier strike when pressed home with resolution is almost impossible to deflect. Witness our carrier operations in the Pacific, particularly Admiral Mitscher's strikes in the Marianas last winter when he was picked up 24 hours before reaching his target."

Some further extracts give a flavour of the diary entries:

30 June 1945. Dinner with Lord Halifax; talk re: British elections (page 379)

"Hopkins said that England must inevitably go Socialist and that Churchill did not want the things for England that the Labor people wanted - federal housing, slum elimination, ownership of industries etc... I asked Hopkins how any country such as England could go communistic - I said England had been able to exist and subsist because she was a trading nation and that a capitalist system was essential to the existence of England ..."

4 September 1945. Cabinet Luncheon.

"Lunched at the White House today. The President announced he was planning to hold Cabinet luncheons once or twice a week; that he was very anxious to see to it that the whole government was knit together as a working team and that it functioned through the Cabinet. He hoped to accommodate this by a gradual absorption of the various extracurriculum agencies as established during the war into the Cabinet posts."

Forrestal's diary entries confirm that such luncheons did become a regular feature over the next few years. They also hint that the cohesion and teamwork for which President Truman hoped were not, perhaps, always so easily to be achieved.

The next full Cabinet meeting highlighted some of the tensions and differing viewpoints on issues such as public health, national defense, the atomic bomb and the best way forward to secure a lasting peace.

7 September 1945. Cabinet.

"...Mr Leo Crowley said that he had just returned from the Middle West and was sure that the country would be violently opposed to the continuation of any universal military training. He said the assumption was that we had fought a war now to get rid of war, that we had the atomic bomb and we had the San Francisco Conference and all the various affirmations of faith in the possibilities of an organization to create the foundations of world peace, and that universal training would create the inference that we didn't have faith in our own platform. To this Secretary Stimson made an eloquent rejoinder, the substance of which was that the only way we could convince the world we were serious about preventing another war was to show that we took our responsibility in that direction with great seriousness. I supported the Secretary of War's point of view and remarked that history showed that all new weapons always developed a countermeasure, beginning with what the Romans developed to counteract Hannibal's use of elephants...Mr Crowley's view continued to be, however, that no matter how much we felt as we did, the country would not support that point of view...Stimson rejoined that he did not accept that statement of cynicism about the good sense and the willingness of the nation to accept its serious responsibilities."

Public health:

The President talked about public health, the lack of doctors, and the inadequacy of doctors and medical service in certain areas of the country. He said he proposed to send a message to Congress at some time on this subject which he knew would arouse the active opposition of the American Medical Association... Fred Vinson observed that doctors would not go into areas where there weren't adequate hospital facilities, that therefore a hospital building program would have to go along with any health program. The President said that the statistics of the Selective Service showed a need for taking radical steps to re-establish the health of the nation."

The Cabinet meeting of 21 September 1945 was "occupied entirely with a discussion of the atomic bomb". Succeeding entries continue to give a vigorous foretaste of the Cold War. There are disagreements over the extent to which, if at all, any information on defense issues, weapon technologies and scientific knowledge, should be shared with other nations."

Two days earlier, Forrestal had appeared before the House Naval Affairs Committee to testify on Representative Carl Vinson's bill fixing the post-war size of the Navy. Forrestal makes a forceful case:

"The United States should remain strong. Second, the Navy is a major component of that strength...In the future as in the past the key to victory and to the freedom of this country will be in the control of the seas and the skies above them...All this sounds as if I did not have confidence in the world organization for peace. I have. But that confidence can only be justified if, while these organizations are in the process of transfer from paper to living reality, all the world knows that the United States will not tolerate the disorder and the destruction of war being let loose again upon the world."

His diary continues to fill with notes of ominous "disorder and destruction"; "situation in Poland becoming increasingly serious"; "Soviets, like Hitler, have become victory drunk and are embarking on world domination"; "Berry's dispatches from Bucharest and Harriman's from Moscow indicate that the Russians have no idea of going through with the Allied Nations statement of policy about Rumania, namely to permit the establishment of free and democratic institutions in Rumania ... Steinhardt makes strong recommendations from Czechoslovakia against the complete withdrawal of American forces. He says this will be an open invitation to the Communists in the country and to Russian influence from without to take over..."

Slightly later, Forrestal is even discussing complaints about the US State Department:

28 September 1945. Far East Relations.

"I had lunch today with Ambassador Hurley, just back from China...He recalled his conversation with Stalin about the Russian attitude toward China. Stalin told him (1) that the Chinese Communists were not Communists in the Russian sense of that

word: (2) that Russia desired to see a strong government in China and recognized Chiang Kai-shek as most nearly able to provide such a government and would therefore support it; (3) that Russia did not desire either revolution or anarchy in China, that their own problems in Asia were far too complex and difficult to desire such a conclusion. He said a good many of the professional staff of the State Department ...had not merely been of no help but a definite hindrance to him. He said that many of the American correspondents ...were communistically inclined, as well as many of the people in the State Department ...who, he said, felt no obligation for the United States except to draw their pay."

A couple of extracts, two years later, give evidence of some progress and much better co-operation:

10 October 1947. Note re: Cabinet (page 1864)

"Krug stated that the survey made by Interior on American capabilities of getting deficiencies in Europe under the Marshall plan showed that the total amount required would be only a fractional amount of the national output, but would, however, say that those fractions necessarily would have a severe impact on already tight situations at home and they would particularly create problems in shipping and transportation. Secretary Anderson complimented Krug on the ability and co-operativeness of the Department of the Interior's working team. He said it was one of the best examples he had seen on intra-government cooperation..."

7 November 1947. Cabinet (pages 1914-1915)

"Cabinet this morning. Present: Marshall, Anderson, Hannegan, Snyder, Clark, Harriman. The Secretary of State read a paper on the present international situation. Outstanding conclusions: The advance of communism has been stemmed and the Russians have been compelled to make a re-evaluation of their position. The consequences will depend to some extent on their internal economy and internal political strength. If they conclude the situation is becoming desperate, particularly internally, they may be driven by the dynamism of their own situation to precipitate civil war in Italy and France this winter. Another possibility, and a very likely one, is the stepping up of the tempo of the guerilla activity in Greece with the possibility here of more definite aggression. Tito is an unpredictable and explosive factor in this situation because the degree of his adherence to the Politburo discipline is not known... Marshall referred to the present status of China as one of critical instability; it is a situation with which we shall have to deal as best we can, maintaining the American interest to the best of our ability. The Middle East he referred to as another tinder box. I repeated my suggestion made several times previously, that a serious attempt be made to lift the Palestine question out of American partisan politics. I said that there had been general acceptance of the fact that domestic politics ceased at the Atlantic Ocean and that no question was more charged with danger to our security than this particular one..."

A quick examination of the diary notes makes it evident that they were not dictated with textual publication in mind. They give a frank, revealing and clear assessment of events with some interesting comments on certain individuals and topics of concern. Some of the early portions of the diary include pasted-in newspaper clippings and similar memorabilia. A number of important secret documents, originating in Forrestal's own or in other Departments, have also been included by him. He developed a habit on returning from meetings of the Cabinet, the State-War-Navy Committee and the National Security Council, of dictating a brief summary of what had been said; sometimes he had assistants take these notes and entered them rather than his own text; frequently there are his own notes of more casual conversations touching on matters of particular interest to him.

As a private record, these diaries make for a most interesting read, covering a crucial period in American and World History.

[<back](#)

Editorial Introduction

James Vincent Forrestal (1892-1949) was the United States' first Secretary of Defense. A gifted yet ultimately ill-starred public servant, he helped to define his nation's military posture at a time of profound flux in international relations. Under Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, he served as Under Secretary of the Navy (beginning on August 22, 1940), as Secretary of the Navy (beginning on May 19, 1944), and finally as Secretary of Defense, from September 17, 1947 until his resignation, instigated by President Truman, on March 28, 1949.

Biographers Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley have called Forrestal "the godfather of the national security state," and though differences with President Truman, internal contradictions in the military establishment he oversaw, and his own personality compromised his effectiveness, his contributions to the ideological and strategic struggles in which his nation was engaged were far-reaching.

An enigmatic figure who drove himself to the limits of endurance and committed suicide shortly after leaving office, Forrestal was both lionized and reviled in his lifetime. To some he was a creature of Wall Street; to others an anti-Communist titan, but perhaps the fairest epitaph can be found on his tombstone, which proclaimed his devotion to "The Great Cause of Good Government."

Forrestal's diaries are an essential though by no means all-purpose tool in any attempt to understand their author and the world in which he lived. The diaries span the last five years of his public life, from March 1944 to March 1949, and consist of 2813 pages, as well as a sprinkling of insertions. In general, the entries were typed on or attached to 6 x 9 ½ inch sheets of paper, and these were originally housed in 15 loose-leaf binders.

The diaries do not contain the handwritten and introspective reflections so often associated with such chronicles. Instead, they take the form of dictated entries, usually embodying summaries of meetings and conversations, as well as documents penned by others that Forrestal deemed of sufficient interest or importance to preserve.

Through the prism of Forrestal's summaries, including meetings of the Cabinet, the State-War-Navy Committee, and, beginning on September 26, 1947, the National Security Council, critical domestic and international issues of his time – from the closing stages of World War II to the opening stages of the Cold War – are documented. The complexity and intractability of these issues, coupled with his own insecurities, would, in time, destroy Forrestal's mental health.

As he noted on January 2, 1946, "one cannot help but be struck by the tremendous task that is involved in the implementation of American policy," a task "further complicated by the fact that we are trying to preserve a world in which a capitalistic-democratic method can continue, whereas if the Russian adherence to truly Marxian dialectics continues their interest lies in a collapse of this system" (pages 775-776).

Forrestal's summaries encapsulate numerous views, most vividly, perhaps, on September 21, 1945, at a cabinet meeting charged with weighing the wisdom of sharing atomic secrets with other nations. Opinions ranged from those of Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, who argued that "failure to give them [the Soviet Union] our knowledge would make an embittered and sour people" (page 495) to those of Forrestal himself, who at a cabinet luncheon on September 18, had already declared himself to be "violently opposed to any disclosure" (page 476).

The momentous questions associated with atomic energy are intermingled with many others. Among them are the unification of the United States military, with its attendant inter-service rivalries; controversies over the size and distribution of postwar military spending, symbolized by Forrestal's conflict with Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington; United States policy towards a divided China and a hostile Soviet Union; relations with Western Europe, including the fate of a beleaguered Berlin; and the future of Palestine, which Forrestal tried and failed to depoliticize.

The documents that Forrestal incorporated in his diaries vary widely in length and subject and offer an unfiltered perspective on issues that concerned him.

There is George Kennan's long and influential telegram from Moscow on February 22, 1946 in which he analyzed the Soviet system and how best to confront "a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*" (page 890). There is the memorandum prepared by an aid to capture the "gist" of Forrestal's meeting with Charles de Gaulle in Algiers on August 18, 1944, including de Gaulle's contention "that France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and, collaterally, Great Britain, must form an economic group and that this group could then act as a counterweight to Russia" (page 14C). And there are news clippings containing the texts of President Truman and Winston Churchill's VE Day addresses of May 8, 1945 (pages 327-329).

Many pages in the diary consist only of daily schedules, particularly towards the end, but even these can be revealing insofar as they document Forrestal's movements and the individuals with whom he interacted.

Forrestal's diaries have an internal history quite apart from the historical record they contain, a history that raises questions of completeness that are only being settled now, with the publication of this microfilm edition.

Following Forrestal's death on May 22, 1949, ownership of the diaries passed to his executors and thence to the *New York Herald Tribune*, which acquired the rights to the diaries for \$100,000 on September 28, 1950. The *Tribune* then granted the Viking Press the right to publish the diaries, which it did selectively in 1951 under the title *The Forrestal Diaries*. Part of this 581-page volume, which was edited by *Tribune* editorial writer Walter Millis in collaboration with former Forrestal aid Eugene Duffied, was serialized in the *Tribune* and other newspapers. An excerpt also appeared in *Life*.

Ownership of the diaries passed from the *Tribune* to Princeton University, Forrestal's alma mater, on December 29, 1952, thanks to funds supplied by Clarence Dillon and Laurance Rockefeller. The acquisition of the diaries coincided with the donation to Princeton of a much larger body of personal papers by Forrestal's wife and two sons, which, like the diaries, focus on Forrestal's years as Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of Defense.

Princeton's acquisition of the diaries also entailed negotiations with the United States Government, which had screened the

Diaries of James V. Forrestal, 1944-1949

published edition and insisted on retaining an interest in the originals for 25 years, lest "unrestricted access to them at this time or in the near future by unauthorized persons or divulgence of their contents may be dangerous to the military security of the United States and may impair the conduct of its foreign affairs."

In the years that followed, the Department of Defense reviewed and, with the exception of a small number of pages, declassified the diaries, a process completed on June 28, 1973. On May 15, 1992 all remaining material of a classified nature was opened, apart from 10 pages relating to atomic issues that the Department of Defense had "temporarily retained" under its agreement with Princeton University.

The comparatively recent declassification of the diaries is one of two reasons for studying the diaries themselves, either at Princeton University's Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library or through this microfilm edition, rather than relying on *The Forrestal Diaries*. According to Millis, the typescript of this volume was "submitted to the Department of Defense . . . for security review. As a result of this review a few passages . . . were eliminated as directly violative of military security. A rather larger portion was condensed, paraphrased or in some instances omitted entirely on the ground that it might materially embarrass the current conduct of international relations, and that its publication would therefore not be in the national interest."

The second reason for consulting the original diaries or this microfilm edition lies in the fact that a significant body of material never made it into print. In Millis's words, "omission and selection on a large scale were unavoidable" given the volume of the diaries. Five categories of material were omitted, including "the merely routine, ephemeral or repetitious," passages that were deemed to lessen the clarity and succinctness of the diaries, references to topics that "have since been thoroughly publicized," references to topics "with which Forrestal was not primarily concerned and which receive only passing and fragmentary mention in the diary," and hearsay concerning specific individuals "which might raise questions of fairness, if not of libel."

By way of example, at a cabinet luncheon on April 28, 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall, newly returned from a meeting of foreign ministers in Moscow, reported that British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was not helpful. His volubility made negotiation difficult. In several cases Marshall had his point made and his discussion concluded only to have his objectives upset by Bevin's tendency to over-talk" (page 1601).

The Forrestal Diaries omits this passage, along with others from the cabinet luncheon, including Forrestal's own assessment of the dualistic roles of the Soviet Union and the United States: "I reminded Marshall of our conversations just before he left and of my own feeling that the United States had everything which the world needed to restore it to normal and the Russians had nothing – neither capital nor goods nor food. That the only products they could export were chaos and anarchy" (page 1603).

Similarly, a meeting on July 8, 1947 relating to atomic energy is entirely omitted from *The Forrestal Diaries*, including its reference to British unhappiness at "our failure to supply them with the industrial know-how for the production of the bomb and for the exploitation otherwise of atomic energy" (page 1715).

It is passages such as these, multiplied many times over, that make Forrestal's diaries so rich a source for students of American public policy at a pivotal juncture in twentieth-century history.

Lloyd Gardner

Bibliography

Forrestal, James V. Diaries, Papers, and Donor Files. Public Policy Papers. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library. Princeton University Library.

Forrestal, James V. *The Forrestal Diaries*. Edited by Walter Millis with the collaboration of E. S. Duffield. New York: The Viking Press, 1951.

Hoopes, Townsend, and Douglas Brinkley. *Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

Rogow, Arnold A. *James Forrestal: A Study of Personality, Politics, and Policy*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963.

[<back](#)

Technical Note

Our microfilm publications have been prepared and produced in accordance with recommended and established guide-lines for the production of microform of superior quality. These conform to the recommendations of the standard guides to good microforming and micropublishing practice.

Attention should be drawn to the nature of the original material. The material consists of folders of the original diary comprising manuscript and typescript entries with some newscuttings and memoranda, 1944-1949. Most of the material is in very good condition. A few typescript, manuscript and printed items contain some faintly legible text written with a variety of inks, pens or pencils. A few items are stained or discoloured at the edges, or comprise material on very thin paper, which is so thin that there is show through that renders the original document difficult to read.

These original characteristics present difficulties of image and contrast which stringent tests and camera alterations cannot entirely overcome. Every effort has been made to minimise these difficulties.

An A4 identification target is filmed at the front of every new folder of material. A contents of reels listing has been added at the front of every new reel of film.

The staff of Preservation Resources, Nine S Commerce Way, Bethlehem, PA 18017-8916, United States of America have exercised the most responsible care in the filming of this unique collection at the Seeley G Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, and this microfilm publication meets the standards established by the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM), the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and all equivalent European Standards.

[<back](#)

Contents of Reels

REEL 1

Volume 1 March 1944 - February 1945 pp 1-189
Volume 2 February 1945 - August 1945 pp 190-458
Volume 3 September 1945 - December 1945 pp 459-770

REEL 2

Volume 4 January 1946 - April 1946 pp 771-1036
Volume 5 May 1946 - September 1946 pp 1037-1283
Volume 6 October 1946 - March 1947 pp 1284-1551

REEL 3

Volume 7 April 1947 - June 1947 pp 1552-1702
Volume 8 August 1947 - October 1947 pp 1703-1903
Volume 9 November 1947 - January 1948 pp 1904-2053

REEL 4

Volume 10 February 1948 - April 1948 pp 2054-2224
Volume 11 May 1948 - July 1948 pp 2225-2397
Volume 12 August 1948 - September 1948 pp 2398-2528
Volume 13 October 1948 - November 1948 pp 2529-2675
Volume 14 December 1948 - February 1949 pp 2676-2787
Volume 15 March 1949 pp 2788-2813

[<back](#)