Public career of Carl Vinson 1909-1941

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PUBLIC CAREER OF CARL VINSON 1909-1941

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BY
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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

In this study of the public career of Carl Vinson, an attempt has been made to delineate the social, political, and economic events which serve as a background and form the milieu for this man's political activities. A native of middle Georgia, he came to be regarded by the people of his state as one of its outstanding citizens. Attention is given to the influential and significant role he played in the political life of both Georgia and the United States, a role which made him a dominant personality within the Democratic Party of his state.

Better known across the country as "Uncle Carl," or "Mr. Navy," because of his long tenure as the powerful Chairman of the Old Naval Affairs Committee of the United States House of Representatives (later the House Armed Forces Committee), he became a widely known public figure. A member of the House of Representatives for over a half century, he accumulated enough seniority and experience in that body to make him a respected builder of this nation's navy. Congressman Vinson was a dedicated servant of his congressional district, his state, and his country. A proud American, he supported and followed what was, in his judgment, a course of action best suited for the well-being of the nation. He supported his country in times of war and threw his influence behind preparations for the nation's defenses in times of peace. Despite his involvement in national affairs, Vinson was too astute a politician to
overlook the desires and needs of his constituents in his congressional
district and native state.

In 1963 upon his retirement, many organizations, important people,
and laymen sent farewell cards and messages of congratulations for his
fifty years in Congress. The writer has tried to discuss briefly his pre-
congressional career with emphasis on birth and early education and his
life in the state legislature. Another chapter focuses on his early
record in Congress along with his contributions to this district.

The last chapter deals with national security and military
preparedness with his prime interest in Naval Affairs, the unification of
the service departments, and the securing of Warner Robins Air Force Base
for Georgia.

This individual was for the past thirty years one of the most
well-known southern officials in recent American History. Vinson regards
himself as a "Progressive Conservative" and a believer in the Democratic
party. He is probably one of the most influential Democrats in middle
Georgia districts today. It is no secret that he boasts of the growth of
this country under the following Democratic presidents: Wilson, Roosevelt,
Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson.

He spent over sixty years in public office, with most of this work
dedicated to the task of helping Georgia citizens. His efforts can be
evaluated in looking at his record and the way he boasted of his record
in Congress. It might be said that he tried to give to the citizens of
Georgia the best in leadership.
CHAPTER I

PRE-CONGRESSIONAL CAREER

Carl Vinson was born November 18, 1883, to Edward S. and Annie Morris Vinson of Baldwin County, Milledgeville, Georgia. This county, located in middle Georgia, was once the seat of the capital of Georgia. It was in Milledgeville that Vinson attended elementary school and later Georgia Military College, often referred to as G.M.C., located in Milledgeville, Georgia. Upon graduation from Georgia Military College, he attended Mercer University and graduated with the LL.B. degree in 1902. During the period from 1902 to 1913 Vinson pursued a variety of occupations from lawyer, judge, solicitor general, to state legislator.

He associated himself with Hines Law Firm located in his home town at the age of eighteen. Upon his return to Milledgeville he learned that Judge Albert Hines' law partner had died. He was invited by Judge Hines to join the firm. He accepted, and two years later he was given a full partnership in this particular law firm which subsequently became known as "Hines and Vinson." He ran for the state legislature unsuccess-fully against Captain Ellis Emmis in 1904. This defeat, however, did not disillusion Vinson; he continued to practice law and in 1905 was appointed Solicitor General for the Baldwin County Circuit, a post he held for four

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In 1908, after having served as Solicitor General for a full term, he decided that once again he would run for, and was elected to the Georgia General Assembly from the 47th district.

He entered the State Legislature in 1909, which at that time remained in session fifty days out of the year. The legislators were paid a salary of seven dollars a day which was eaten up by expenses. His law ability and skill was soon recognized by his colleagues and they rewarded him by electing him speaker pro-tem the 1911-12 term.

In the Georgia legislature, Vinson introduced many bills, a number of which died in either the Ways and Means Committee or the Appropriations Committee. He was interested in education and the state hospital located in Milledgeville, Georgia. In June, 1910, while the Georgia House was in session, he presented the following bills:

- a bill to appropriate $35,000 for the purpose of building a new college on the campus of the Georgia Normal and Industrial College at Milledgeville.2

- a bill to appropriate $25,000 for the support and maintenance of the state sanitarium for the insane.3

He also presented other bills this year. For example, under special appropriation bills, Vinson introduced a bill to appropriate $15,000 to the trustees of the state hospital,4 and a bill to provide for the

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1 Ibid.
construction of a reservoir for the state. Still another bill would have empowered the state legislature to ask the governor to appoint a group of trustees for the State Sanitarium.

The above would suggest that Vinson's primary interest was the improvement of education and conditions for the mentally deficient people located in Milledgeville. Vinson seems to have been an influential leader in the Georgia House and since he had been solicitor general of Baldwin County, he did not hesitate to use his influence in introducing and presenting bills or lobbying for bills which he persuaded other state legislators to introduce for him.

Every year in the state legislature Vinson managed to present or introduce a bill or measure to the legislature stating the needs of the state supported colleges of Georgia and the state mental hospital. In 1911 Vinson was interested in the state's welfare, but never did get all of the necessary measures he advocated that year because of time. In this year he presented a bill to the Georgia House to amend the 1910 Tax Act to levy and collect additional tax for support of State Government and for other purposes. This bill was referred to the Ways and Means Committee and eventually passed. At the same time, a bill to appropriate $19,650 to Georgia Normal and Industrial College was eventually passed in 1911.

Following the 1910 census of the states, the Georgia Assembly faced the task of redistricting. The young lawyer from Milledgeville had definite

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1Ibid., p. 107.
2Ibid., p. 159.
3Georgia House Journal, 1911, pp. 198-200.
ideas about his own county. An appointment to the reapportionment committee gave him the opportunity to present his views. When the redistricting dust settled, surprised Baldwinites found they had been taken away from the Sixth District and placed into one of the hottest battle grounds in the state, the so-called "Bloody Tenth."

The Tenth District presented at least a fighting chance, Vinson reasoned, and it also was dominated by a heavily populated county (Richmond), and its seat Augusta, and had been the scene of some of the state's "bloodiest" battles. It offered one advantage however, Baldwin was at the far end of the district, while from Richmond it might be possible to convince some of Baldwin's neighboring counties to get out from under the shadows of Augusta by voting for Carl Vinson of Milledgeville. Only one factor had been overlooked. The citizens of Baldwin, angered by being shifted to the "Bloody Tenth," refused to send Carl back to the General Assembly for a third term. He lost his bid for re-election by five ballots, the only political defeat he has ever suffered at the hands of the voters.

Undismayed, he turned to the Governor and obtained an appointment as Judge of the Baldwin County Court. Meanwhile, he watched developments in the new Congressional District, hopeful that he could soon profit from his carefully drawn plan implemented when he sat on the 1911 state redistricting committee. The wait was shorter than expected.

On February 14, 1914, Georgia's United States senior Senator, Augustus Octavius Bacon, died. Representative Thomas W. Hardwick of the Tenth District made a bid for the vacant Senate seat and was elected at the next general election. The scramble was on for a successor to Hardwick.
Vinson announced his candidacy for the United States House of Representatives and in a rented Model T Ford with a hired driver, he set out to campaign in his district. Miss Martha Thomas, a stenographer in the Hines and Vinson Law Office and who later became Vinson's first secretary, stated years later that "most people did not think he had a chance of being elected."¹

One of the candidates was the man who had defeated him in 1904, and the other two were men of means who did not think that Vinson had a chance, primarily because he had little money with which to conduct a campaign. His staff consisted of a campaign manager, Dave Howard, "Miss Martha," (as he often refers to her), and a driver for the Model T Ford. What he did not possess in money he made up for in energy. He campaigned for as much as twenty hours a day until he was a familiar figure at every district schoolhouse or crossroads where he could pull together a handful of people to listen to his views. His platform consisted of slogans such as: "A vote for Vinson means youthful and stronger representation," "More voice in Congress; you will get it when you vote for Vinson."²

By the time the campaign was drawing to a close, he was in debt. He owed the bank of Milledgeville, and he owed the printers of the Baldwin News. When the polls closed however, he had won the election with eight of the fourteen counties voting for him, giving him a majority of the votes in the Tenth Congressional District. This district was made up of

¹Jerry Moore, "A Tribute to Carl Vinson," The Union Recorder (Milledgeville), November 18, 1963, pp. 6-18.

²Ibid.
the following counties: Baldwin, Hancock, Crawford, Glascock, Jasper, Jefferson, Jones, Monroe, Putnam, Wilkerson, Twiggs, Laurens, Washington, and Richmond.

In summing up his pre-congressional career, it is apparent that Vinson received some of his political training in the Georgia House; his law practice aided quite a bit, while the position of County Judge helped to bring him to the attention of the public.

The early life and pre-congressional career of Vinson served as a background or the foundation of his knowledge of the national Congress. It is claimed that his leadership in the Tenth Congressional District provided more prosperity and helped more Georgians in that area than any other congressman from Georgia.

Vinson was a strong believer in law and order, a member of the Methodist Church, and a staunch Democrat and student of politics. Even as a neophyte congressman, this man was experienced enough in the ways of practical politics to make an early impression on both his colleagues and constituents.
CARL VINSON ASSUMED THE ROLE OF CONGRESSMAN IN 1914 AT THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR I. HIS EARLY CAREER MAY NOT ENTAIL ALL THE DRAMA OF A PRESENT DAY ELECTED GOVERNOR, MAYOR, OR STATE SENATOR, BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT EVEN AS A NEOPHYTE ON THE NATIONAL SCENE, HE SHARED IN THE SHAPING OF A NEW UNITED STATES, A NEW SOUTH, AND CERTAINLY A NEW GEORGIA. FOR IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR I, DURING THE EARLY 1920'S THE GROWTH OF THE UNITED STATES IN A NEW ECONOMIC LIFE, AN EXPERIMENT ON PROHIBITION, GROWTH OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, BOOM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE GROWTH OF THE UNITED STATES SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM BEGAN TO TAKE PLACE. VINSON'S CONTRIBUTIONS WERE LIKE THOSE OF OTHER REPRESENTATIVES, THAT IS, HE VOTED FOR OR AGAINST MEASURES WHICH HE FELT TO BE BENEFICIAL FOR THE CITIZENS OF HIS COUNTRY AND FOR THE VOTERS OF HIS DISTRICT.

WHEN HE ENTERED CONGRESS HE WAS NOT YET THIRTY-ONE YEARS OF AGE, MAKING HIM THE NATION'S YOUNGEST CONGRESSMAN. DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS HE WORKED HARD, AND MANY NEWSPAPER ARTICLES WERE WRITTEN ABOUT HIS EFFORTS AS A NEW CONGRESSMAN. AMONG THOSE WHO VOICED PRIDE IN HIS WORK WAS THE MARIETTA COURIER (MANY MILES OUTSIDE VINSON'S DISTRICT), WHICH URGED ITS READERS TO KEEP THEIR EYES ON THE GIFTED STATESMAN FROM THE TENTH. "CARL," THE COURIER REPORTED, "IS WORKING LIKE A FARMER DETERMINED TO REFLECT CREDIT UPON HIS SECTION OF THE COUNTRY. PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF GEORGIA ARE
already asking about him."\(^1\) A story which appeared in a Milledgeville paper, although perhaps apocryphal, helps to illustrate the extent to which this Georgia Congressman had become a well-known public figure. A Russian, according to the newspaper account, "with outrageous whiskers and large clumping feet" appeared in one of the Tenth District courts to seek his United States citizenship. When the judge asked him to tell how he was elected, the Russian's reply threw the court into laughter: "By the Democratic Party." The judge then asked who the greatest man in this country was. This brought the immediate reply, "The honorable Carl Vinson, Representative from this district."\(^2\)

Vinson served his country in a period many historians called the emergence of contemporary America or the "Great Crusade." For, since the administration of Woodrow Wilson the growth of a "New Freedom" has been seemingly the ultimate aim of politics.

During Vinson's long years in Congress it is not any secret that he played a dominant role in the growth of American naval power. At the same time, Vinson, being a representative from an agricultural area, voted for measures supporting agriculture. To assist the growth of local credit and the increase of scientific farming, Vinson voted for the Federal Farm Loan Act of July 17, 1916 and also the Smith-Lever Act of 1914.\(^3\) These two acts, the first being a compromise between the position of making available money for farms to borrow on the security of their land, and the second

\(^1\)The Marietta Courier, October 13, 1915, p. 8.

\(^2\)The Union Recorder (Milledgeville), November 11, 1917, p. 6.

borrowing money through membership in the National Farm Loan Association, were designed to give relief to the farmer. The capital for these loans however, came largely from the federal government or federal treasury. These acts helped the farmers especially in their need for credit, with the Smith-Lever Act providing grants-in-aid to promote agricultural extension programs in rural countries in the mid-western and Southern states.

The farming crops of cotton, corn, peas, peaches, and pepper improved because of mechanization which really resulted from new technological advances. Vinson saw the state of Georgia declining farm population in the early 1920's and, in fact, almost thirteen million acres were withdrawn from cultivation and the farmers' national income on a net fell from 16 percent in 1919 to 8.8 percent in 1929.

Vinson voted for the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929 which established a Federal Farm Board to supervise the lending of money to cooperative associations. Inasmuch as Vinson supported many measures centered around agriculture, the farm life in his district was different from other farms over the country.

Like other Southern representatives, Vinson voted for the National Prohibition Law of 1917 which restricted the use of foodstuff in liquor manufacture, and in 1918 prohibited altogether the war time sale or manufacture of intoxicants. He also voted for the final 1920 prohibition act over President Wilson's veto. Many Southern Congressman took the attitude that alcohol was a perilous incitement to crimes of violence, especially among European immigrants and Negroes. This measure however proved to be
disastrous as more drinking occurred. However, during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, Vinson voted for the repeal of the Volstead Act and also the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth Amendment.

For years the southern and mid-western states farmers enjoyed the use of child labor. Many Congressmen really did nothing, despite the fact there were many policies and practices that were not of good taste for workers under the age of sixteen. In 1916 and 1919 some attempts by Congress were made to regulate child labor but to no great avail. One act (Keating-Owen Act) of 1916 prohibited the shipment in interstate commerce of goods produced by child labor. This act would in detail give Congress power to legislate the employment of persons under eighteen. Vinson believed that child labor as it existed at that time was no great evil or that it could be controlled best by the states. Here Vinson stuck to the doctrine of his belief of individual rights and voted against the bill, realizing that this law would affect the district that sent him to Washington. For many farmers depended upon their children and relatives to work in the fields, and he rationalized that many Negro families would have been affected by this measure.

Vinson believed in education and he supported all measures that helped to increase the growth of education. There is little evidence that he voiced any open opinion for education for the Negro, but he did support education on a general basis. In 1914 the Smith-Lever Act,


2Interview with Reginald Murphy, Editor of the Atlanta Voice, Nov. 10, 1967.
described above, provided for extension work in agriculture by cooperation between the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 established a federal board for vocational education and granted appropriations to aid work already locally undertaken in commercial, industrial, domestic science, and vocational work as well as in agriculture. This measure aided the farmers in the mid-western areas as well as the southern farmers. Vinson voted for these two measures which not only helped the farmers in his district, but aided education also. It is said that the passing of the Smith-Hughes bill opened up new avenues for rural high schools to receive federal aid in the area of agriculture and home economics.¹

One might say that despite his loyalty to states' rights he supported many extensions of the federal government for the growth of education during 1914-1925. He realized the advantage that this aid had to the South and to all rural counties. Vinson also pushed for more money for his state to encourage growth of higher institutions. He pushed for money for the University of Georgia and its feeder schools. Many high schools were built in Georgia and in many counties the growth of little red schoolhouses became popular. The citizens of Georgia saw Vinson support educational growth not only in Georgia but for the entire nation.²

Another pressing problem after World War I that demanded attention from the Southern legislators was that of compensation for those soldiers returning from the war. Vinson believed that these men should have some

²Letter from Ted Lippman, Former Political Editor of the Atlanta Constitution, Feb. 21, 1968.
compensation for their time in the service. It is important to note that President Warren G. Harding and President Calvin Coolidge vetoed this measure, but in 1924 Congress at last passed a law over the presidential veto which awarded certificates of insurance in value proportional to length of service. This was to Vinson a great personal triumph for he was now a member of the Naval Affairs Committee and ranking member on the Committee.

Although Vinson entered Congress during the administration of Wilson and his "New Freedom," policies and methods changed with the election of a Republican Congress and president. Vinson served in this time of transition. He voted for the Transportation Act of 1920, better known as the Esch-Cummins Act, which returned the railroads to private ownership, but with some federal control and extended government regulations. In the third session of the 66th Congress, Vinson voted for the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, which restored shipping to private hands as quickly as possible and sought to preserve a large American Merchant Marine.¹

Vinson did not hesitate, however, to go against Democratic party measures and voted against issues that he felt were detrimental. For example, his views on immigration were similar to those of other conservatives and at first he voted against the Emergency Quota Law of 1921. He finally voted for the measure after it had been watered down by the House of Representatives.²

¹U. S. Congress, Committee on Transportation Report, 66th Cong., 3rd sess., 1921, pp. 785-793.
It is important to state that the South after the Civil War divided the issue of segregation into two well-defined schools of thought. One would maintain the status quo or would even impose further inequalities; the smallest concession, political leaders felt, would inevitably lead to other concessions and eventually to social equality (that is, intermarriage), and to prevent it they seemed ready to go to any lengths. The other school supported separate equality; thus Jim Crow laws called for separate but equal facilities for Negroes and whites. Needless to say, both schools between 1900-1949 supported white supremacy and segregation. A third school, naturally weak in numbers, was represented by the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, which demanded political action for the immediate abolition of segregation. The mass of Southern Negroes were understandably silent, but their leaders quietly opposed segregation.¹

If Vinson believed in the democratic process, he also believed that his followers did not welcome participants to share in government until they had demonstrated their "fitness and earnestness" by a prolonged struggle for that end. Sometimes the newcomer in the political process must even prove himself more fit than the older sharers. Vinson may have shared the belief that many historians shared, that since the Civil War the Negroes in this country have been engaged in this struggle aided, as always in a democracy, by certain men of goodwill. As always in a democracy, the opposition to the rise of the new element is bitter. White hatred of Negroes, both in North and South, rose sharply in the early 1920's though it never attained the heat generated in the 1870's. Negroes'¹

¹Interview with Reginald Murphy, Editor of the Atlanta Voice, November 10, 1967.
participation in World War I increased their self-confidence, and this was further stimulated by the shocking discovery in the early 1930's that they held a strong political band if not actually the balance of power in certain northern centers, particularly New York and Chicago.¹

Vinson was a member in good standing during his years in public life of the so-called solid South. Some historians have claimed that the "excesses" of Reconstruction united the South after the Civil War. United in the Democratic Party, politics in the South was aimed at preserving internal discipline, externally it was continuation of the Southerners' way of vetoing national actions.² For example, the two-thirds rule gave the South the veto over the selection of Democratic presidential candidates, while its congressmen were so regularly re-elected that they acquired the seniority which gave them virtual control of the party and of Congress whenever the party was in power. Each Democratic president learned that to get his program passed he must win the support of the Southern legislators. If he did not, the result was an informal but none the less effective alliance with the Republican to thwart his program.

Many Southern Congressmen believed that white supremacy was the belief that the Negro could not be expected ever to measure up to the white man's standard of character and achievement. Vinson entered Congress when rivalry in the South between agrarian and industrial interests threatened to give the Negro the balance of power between them. But the Negro was largely limited to sharecropping and menial labor; white workers

²Ibid.
were also sharecroppers, but they had first call on skilled labor and factory jobs. The Negro's suffrage was withdrawn (curiously enough, by the Populists); while Jim Crow laws, and with the help of the Supreme Court, limited his use of public facilities. Party quarrels were settled in the white primary elections and the winners were given the support of a united party in the final election; this support did not include much for the Negro.¹

Many farmers in the Tenth District of Georgia enjoyed Rural Free Delivery, the growth of county schools, consolidation, and other agricultural measures that at least satisfied the farmers of the Tenth that their congressman was at least a man working in their behalf. In fact, many felt that he was indirectly responsible for Rural Free Delivery extended as early as it was in middle Georgia.²

Early as 1920 Vinson was instrumental in securing other benefits for his district. In 1920 a veteran's hospital was built in Augusta with funds from the federal treasury. This hospital, known as the Augusta Veterans Hospital, aided many veterans from the first World War and after. In addition to this, Fort Gordon, or Camp Augusta, as it was once called, was founded. This camp is still a training place for military men. Today it employs many civilians, thus contributing to the city of Augusta's economy.³ He was instrumental in getting money appropriated for the construction of a dam thirty miles below Augusta to help the water condition

¹Ibid.
²Interview with Reginald J. Murphy, Editor of the Atlanta Voice, Nov. 10, 1967.
³The Union Recorder (Milledgeville), Nov. 19, 1920.
in that section of Georgia. This dam aided in controlling the water of Savannah River. The building of a bridge across the Oconee River near Augusta was another project on the local level that was an important contribution attributed to Vinson.

Probably, according to Vinson, his greatest re-election to Congress was in the year 1920 when he defeated Thomas E. Watson who later became Senator of Georgia and a rabid advocate of white supremacy. Many headlines were found in the Georgia newspapers when this political upset took place. For example, the Macon News and Telegraph ran such headlines as this: "Vinson carries war to Watson's Hometown." The Augusta Chronicle pointed out that "Richmond gives majority of votes to Congressman Vinson." The Baldwin News carried articles of victory with such headlines as: "Vinson wins Over Watson For Congress in Tenth." This certainly must have been the turning point in the history of his long career in Congress. With this expressed confidence by the voters of this district Vinson must have realized that his work represented satisfaction to the White voters of Georgia.

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1 The Augusta Chronicle, Oct. 6, 1920.
CHAPTER III

VINSON ON NATIONAL SECURITY

The military problem of National Security is one of the most dangerous and difficult problems that mankind has ever faced. Military and national security is a problem as old as the first days of history when the cavemen banded together into tribes, villages, and finally towns in order to provide security for themselves. The basic problem of security still plagues mankind; solutions have changed primarily because of contemporary technological methods of waging warfare.

The United States witnessed in World War I a continuation of industrialized warfare. The increased use of the machine-gun, trench warfare and the rapid production of the tank, changed the idea of war and man's way of thinking. The new change came in the form of many types of weapons which were results of the technological revolution in warfare. Most of these weapons were very destructive; this forced the nation's leaders to express their ideas about military preparedness and national security, and their prescriptions on how their nation should prepare were limitless. Among such men was Carl Vinson, whose chairmanship of the House Armed Services Committee gave him the opportunity to implement his philosophies of defense and national security. His basic beliefs included the following concepts:
The nation must be adequately armed to prevent aggression. He expressed this philosophy in these words: "The most expensive thing in the world is a cheap Army and Navy. History has clearly shown that weakness invites attack."

The size of the fighting forces must be geared to the strategic plans laid down by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and not to political considerations or arbitrary dollar limitations. "Our national defense problems must always be resolved with complete freedom from partisan bias or flavor. If it is a question of choosing between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Budget Bureau, I will place my confidence in the Joint Chiefs."

Existing weapons must not be scrapped in favor of plans still on the drawing boards. "Blueprints may be cheap but they cannot defend the rights of the Nation."

The specialized functions of the individual services must not be impaired or destroyed. War is three-dimensional (land, sea, and air), and the separate services exist for the simple reason that there are separate and distinct missions which are assigned to them. Vinson at first opposed merger of the services for he felt that this would spell disaster. "It would not save the taxpayer one dime and would provide a one-way ticket to defeat. Competition is the heart and soul of American industry and the American people; why should it be denied to the Armed Forces?"¹

During World War I the United States embarked on a major ship building program to provide the many destroyers needed to protect troop transports from enemy submarines. The Navy was called upon to convoy more than 2,000,000 troops to France. This difficult feat was accomplished with the loss of only one transport. After this war, the Washington Nine-Power Naval Treaty of 1922 limited battleship construction; as a result the speeding up of warship construction after World War I was mostly confined to that of cruisers and carriers. It is necessary to note that the real progress in the United States Navy was made in Naval Aviation especially in the area of carrier aircraft and carrier flight tactics. This was necessary so that we would not be caught as we were caught during 1922 when we had to convert a coal ship into the aircraft carrier the U. S. S. Langley.\(^1\)

Vinson believed in the development of national security. As early as 1914 during Wilson's presidency, he had pushed national security for the United States. After the Republicans took over in the 1920's, Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes advocated collective security to a point, but never total collective security. Congressman Vinson openly attacked the Washington treaties because he felt that they contributed to weakening the American position in military affairs. Vinson believed that naval supremacy for the United States could only come with expensive building which Congress would have been most reluctant to finance. Vinson agreed with many American naval experts that the United States needed

fortifications in the Western Pacific. It is significant that this man's preeminent role in defense planning began before America entered the first World War. Indicative of this were his actions regarding a proposed navy budget voted on prior to American entrance into the war. On May 27, 1916, the House of Representatives was angrily fighting over the navy budget which included a one hundred and sixty million dollar ship-building program. This amount, which would not only buy half a nuclear carrier today, was at that time the largest such program ever proposed by the government, and some House members though it was too much. These men reflected the feeling of many of their constituents who thought it was too much to spend on the construction of war ships. Democrats charged that Republicans had sent the Navy into stormy seas while Republicans said that the navy's plight was the fault of the Democrats. In the midst of this tumult, Vinson, then only thirty-two years of age arose in the House to make his first speech on the subject of military preparedness. He swiftly hammered out the basic philosophy which guided him throughout his almost half a century of congressional service. His chief contention was that a "Nation can maintain peace only if its defenses are strong, and preparedness is a non-partisan question." He said, "my country and its safety comes ahead of any party."¹

Even though he visited the Carribean early in his career, he never again went outside the United States. His longest trip besides that was a visit to the west coast in 1919. In spite of his provincialism, Vinson's work aided in helping the nation today spend some 60 billion of

¹Jerry Moore, "A Tribute to Carl Vinson," The Union Recorder (Milledgeville), Nov. 17, 1964, p. 6.
its 90 billion dollars for military preparedness and another 5.7 billion for mutual security. About 30 billion dollars of the coming year's budget will require specific authorization from the old Vinson committee.\(^1\)

Early in his career President Calvin Coolidge asked Vinson to serve on the Morrow Board which blueprinted the future of American aviation. The President felt "that your efforts will result in bringing out the good qualities of the Air Service and in suggesting what action can be taken for their improvement." Other members of this board were Admiral Frank F. Fletcher, United States Navy; Major General James C. Harford, Dwight D. Morrow, James Parker, Hiram Bingham, William F. Durand, Arthur C. Devison, and Howard Coffin, all members of the Republican Party. The Morrow Board, after extensive hearings, recommended numerous changes in laws affecting aviation. Vinson authored many of the proposals, all of which were enacted. One proposal was that assistant secretaries for aeronautics be established in the war, navy, and commerce departments. Five year aircraft procurement programs were approved for the services, the Army Air Corps was created, the principle of flight pay was permanently sanctioned, new emphasis was given to the procurement of aviators and improved aircrafts, and finally the Air Commerce Act was adopted. This act proved to be the legislative cornerstone for the development of United States Civil and Commercial Aviation.\(^2\)

### Unification of Service Departments

During his early years in Congress, Vinson drew two committee assignments neither of which he was particularly interested in. These

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid.
committees were the old pension committee, now defunct, and the other was the committee of the District of Columbia. He worked very hard on both committees, but he was always ready for something else. In the year 1917, opportunities came because of vacancies opened up on a few choice committees. He had by then enough seniority to choose the Naval Affairs Committee. This has always seemed a mystery to many people and students of history, for his district did not have any water located near it but the Oconee River. Carl Vinson did not think that this interest in such a committee was strange for he was concerned about the nation's defenses. He already declared that peace could be guaranteed only if a nation was prepared to defend itself and he saw a chance to fight for his views on this new committee. Vinson also visualized a growing role for seapower. Europe was embroiled in World War I and he predicted in 1916 that participants in the World War I conflict would emerge with larger navies than they had at the beginning of the war. This view also influenced his desire to select the Naval Affairs Committee.¹

During the first session of the 69th Congress, the fate of the air service and of unification as a part of the general movement for reorganization and unification became an important issue for the House Military Affairs Committee.² Many ideas were considered. One was the need for a single Department of National Defense which lost in the committee by a vote of eleven to ten. In 1918 the Senate Military Affairs Committee

¹Ibid.
tried to reorganize the military services. They failed but Vinson came to favor such an idea. After the Morrow Board Committee had made its report, the House Military Affairs Committee considered many measures, one of which led to authorization of expansion program for the Army Air Corps as one step toward a program for unification. This committee was not successful in selling Congress on the idea of reorganization of services. Vinson remembered this and in 1941 when he became chairman of the House Armed Services Committee he introduced legislation to give strength to the early 1926 unification efforts.

The Army bill of the late 1930's and early 1940's was examined in both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. The main interest of the committee was to test the Army presentation against the conventions of Naval administration which half of the committee had learned as members of the old House Naval Affairs Committee. The committee paid considerable attention to the mysterious relationship of the Secretary of the Army to the Chief of Staff, and to the Chief of Staff's responsibilities and authority. Vinson inquiries did not lead to much clarification. "Why shouldn't the Chief of Staff of the Army," he asked General Mark Calbis, "have the same command function that the corresponding positions in the other two branches of the service carry?" "Well, certainly no Chief of Staff that I know has been hampered by the lack of that command

1 Senate Armed Services Committee, Army Organization Act of 1926, Hearings, 69th Cong., 2nd sess., 1926, p. 16.


3 House Armed Services Committee, Army Organization Bill, 1950 Hearings, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., p. 6053.
authority," Calbíis replied. When asked about the possibility of his 'passing the buck' down the line of military command, Arthur Rice, who at that time was Chief of Staff, indicated that he did not have, and was not asking for, either statutory authority or responsibility, but only the re-enactment of the traditional function of the Chief of Staff as advisor to the Secretary of the Army. Collins answered: "Actually, I assume the responsibility and duties in every way." Yet, unhappy with the House bill, which would give him that responsibility by assigning command control to the Chief of Staff, he told the Senate committee, "we feel that the lack of this provision of command responsibility guarantees the civilian control that you are concerned about."¹

With this inquiry by Vinson, Congress passed the Army organization bill fairly intact. It limited permanent duty assignments to the Department of the Army to three thousand officers and the General Staff to one thousand. The Navy and the Air Force also obtained statutory authority for their postwar organization, the Navy in 1948, and the Air Force in 1951 shortly after the Army bill was approved.

This new legislation for the Naval establishment was much clearer than the statutes applicable under the wartime reorganizations. Vinson objected to a more specific and inclusive statement of the Chief of Naval Operations authority because he thought the problem had already been taken care of with broad interpretation of the old law.²

²House Armed Services Committee, Making Certain Changes in Organization of Navy Department and for Other Purposes, Hearing, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., pp. 5, 477-78.
The Army organization act, two years later, was even clearer than the New Navy Department legislation. Its purpose, as the House Committee was later told, like that of the Navy bill, was to take away a lot of statutory authority which in the course of years, had been delegated to various officers. Congressional reaction to each of these three bills was indicative of the new problem posed for the new Armed Services Committees in both houses by unification.¹

The most persistent problem was the extent to which Congress should or could direct and control the military services. It was natural that Vinson, though sometimes from the minority side of the House Committee, should dominate the questioning in Congress on this matter. By 1948 he was the only remaining member of either committee who had served as an Armed Service Committee Chairman before unification began in 1947. In considering the Navy bill, Vinson had shown some reluctance to alter historic language dealing with the authority of the Chief of Naval Operations of this country. When he became Chairman of the Old Naval Affairs Committee in 1931 he favored increased ship building. At that time he had asserted that "I favor a Navy for our country second to none." To enforce his views he introduced a ship construction program to bring the fleet up to treaty strength. He did not get the necessary support from the White House; therefore, during the Hoover administration there was no authorization for the building of any Navy ships.

In 1934 Vinson, during the first administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, won approval for the passage of two bills to further expand the ship building program. One was the historic Vinson-Trammel Act which

¹House Armed Services Committee, To Provide for Organization of Air Force and Department of Air Force and for Other Purposes, Hearings, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., p. 80.
provided long range ship tonnage authority for the Navy, with a goal of 102 new Navy ships by 1942. This act also limited the profits of contractors and expanded the Naval Aviation program. Additional ship building programs were sponsored by Vinson and backed by Roosevelt in 1938, 1939, and 1940. It was no wonder that in the early 1940's and 1950's he was interested in including the Navy in unification of the services. Underlying his stand was undoubtedly some concern that precise, new statutory language would provide Congress less of a hold on the Navy than old and vague law.

However, Vinson realized that the Army bill was different because he believed that in 1940 the general staff doctrines lay heavy on it, a situation that he had detested in early Naval investigation hearings. Another concern of his was the fact that the statutory toeholds for Congressional control were fewer. Vinson asked many questions about the Army bill as far as maintaining Congressional control. One of which went like this: "Now Mr. Gray, as Chief of Naval Operations, I want to know how the Congress can carry out its constitutional responsibility of providing and maintaining an Army if the only control that Congress has over what type of Army we have is that of the amount of money we give to support the Army?" He charged that the administration wanted "to fix it here by law so that Congress will only be in the picture so far as appropriations are concerned and wherever possible leave absolutely to the Secretary of the Army the complete management, control and regulation by departmental orders of the Army Establishment."^{2}

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^{1}The Union Recorder (Milledgeville), January 16, 1955.
Allied with Representative Ray Cole, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee who also had experience from the old Naval Affairs Committee, Vinson amended the Army's bill by adding this stipulation from Chief Naval Operations law that the Army Chief as well as Navy Chief be directly responsible to the Secretary for operational matters. It appears that although the change in the bill was small, Vinson hoped that this would strengthen the Unification Bill further. He believed that under this unification law the three service chiefs would have the opportunity to communicate with Congress but no responsibility to do so. On the other hand he believed that the Chief of Naval Operations had a statutory responsibility imposed on him to keep his military machine in order. This Vinson felt that even the Chief of Naval Operations might want to come to Congress even against the wishes of the approval of his civilian superiors. The bill, when approved, contained this amendment, though modified somewhat by the Senate.¹

Vinson's desire to aid in unification of the service departments was based on his desire to get a single chain of command as the only means for achieving coherence in the administration of the nation's defense. He realized that this problem was not a simple one but one that required the organization of all of the departments into one department. Not only did he as early as 1920 foresee that centralization of the service department was highly desirable, but he realized then that discontent and decentralization in later years might prove disastrous. It was not until the late 1940's and early 1950's that Vinson really pushed all bills into Armed Services Committee of the Senate, and later to the

¹Ibid.
Congress for approval. His control of his committee gave him the necessary leverage to push through measures that he thought would serve as a stepping stone to strengthening Service Departments. He also tried to test many of the Army bills against the bills of Naval administration.

It should be pointed out here that his interest in national security, along with his control of the Armed Services Committee, both provided the means by which he would help his Congressional district secure federal money through the erection of federal military installations.

**Securing of Warner Robins Depot**

Vinson's determination and help gave Georgia the Warner Robins depot located near Macon, Georgia. At the beginning of the year 1941, Bibb County officials had obtained Camp Wheeler, the Naval Ordinance Plant, Cochran Field and authorization for improvements at Herbert Smart Airport. In addition to this, other cities in Georgia wanted this program near their locations. Despite this, Vinson informed the people of Macon through its Chamber of Commerce, that the Army Air Corps was looking for a place for a new installation. Atlanta seemed to have had the inside track on this proposed depot. The Macon delegation, however, would not give up, and in 1941 received more encouragement with the announcement that an Army board desired more information about a certain Wellston location between Macon and Fort Valley, Georgia. There were differences as to the most desirable site of this Air Corps Depot because the Air Corps wanted it located near a larger city, while the engineers favored Macon because of its construction facilities. Realizing that the city did not have adequate housing facilities for a depot of this size,
the city officials of Macon called upon Vinson for aid. His reply was that it "is now up to the sleeping giant to awake. If it cannot meet this requirement then the depot will be located at Allenwood near Atlanta, I have done my part now it is up to Macon." The people of Bibb County did not want Atlanta to get this depot so they went to work. As a result the housing requirement was exceeded by 50 percent. Premises were secured from contractors to build 3,000 houses, 1,000 more than the required quota, and commitments were obtained from insurance companies to buy the mortgages. The F. H. A. agreed to enforce all mortgages and the R. F. C. mortgage company promised to purchase mortgages on all houses constructed. Meanwhile, the decision on the location of the depot was finally made by the Assistant Secretary of War who received a delegation from Macon in Washington on June 13, 1941. Vinson accompanied the group which consisted of Mayor Bowden, G. Chestney, and W. T. Anderson. Raymond T. Gahill of the Federal Housing Administration also went with the group. The official decision in favor of Wellston, a site located near Macon, was made the next day. It is reasonable to conclude that through the intercession of Vinson won and the newspapers carried the story.

Warner Robins was built according to standard plans of the Air Service Command with some modifications to fit local conditions. A few months after construction was underway the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. This had considerable influence on the outward appearance of the depot. Construction started September 1, 1941, and by August 31, 1942 the

essential parts of both the industrial and campment areas were completed. Vinson has aided in making middle Georgia a part of the nation's defense program, while at the same time providing a source of revenue for his Congressional district.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

Ability to control testimony is one of the most essential assets of a Congressional Chairman. Although the Armed Forces would have transported Vinson to any of the nation's bases, he seldom ever traveled more than a few miles from Washington or Georgia. Carl Vinson is, beneath his gruff exterior, basically shy and retiring and seems intensely uncomfortable when anyone pays him too much attention. While in Washington, he shunned the public spotlight and turned down all invitations except those to White House functions which he looked on as command performances.

While Congress was in session, he lived a life of quiet seclusion in a Washington suburb, Chevy Chase, Maryland. Vinson's home was a modest six-room bungalow purchased in 1922 soon after his marriage. Since no children were born to the union, the death of his wife in 1950 left him with no close kin in the home. He shared it with Tillman and Mollie Snead and their two sons, Tillman and Carl. He spent at least nine hours at his desk, in committee meetings and on the House floor, longer if it was necessary and returned to Chevy Chase around 5:00 p.m. for the evening at home. He seldom used a taxi while he was in Washington and even now in retirement, he walks about one-half mile daily at his plantation in Georgia.

Mr. Vinson is an avid reader of daily newspapers—New York Times, the Washington Post, the Atlanta Journal, the Atlanta Constitution, and
the Macon News and Telegraph. While at Capital Hill he read the Army, Navy, and Air Force journals daily.

Vinson believed that one way by which a man on a fixed salary could get ahead was to obligate himself to buy either property or securities, preferably both. If one of the employees on Vinson's staff was not a home owner he promptly pushed him in that direction. He talked to them about their families and after work he told them about his family. While in Washington, he ran "River Ridge Plantation," his farm located near Milledgeville. "Why," his overseer Barney Collins explained, "Congressman Vinson would write once a week at the beginning of every week instructing me as to some of the many tasks that were to be carried out at the farm."$^1$ A weekly reply usually was his answer to his employer telling him of the conditions of the farm. The farm, located appropriately enough on Vinson Highway about a two-minute drive from Milledgeville's city limits, covers 601.0 acres of land. At one time, together with his father's property, it comprised more than 1500 acres and was the top cotton producer in the county. He bought this farm in 1926 "because my district is a farming district," and "I felt that I ought to learn something about agriculture." Today, after an unsuccessful fight with the boll weevil, the cotton has been replaced by white-faced cattle and feed crops.

While Vinson was in Congress his committee and congressional staff consisted of some 18 to 20 people. More than one-half of the

$^1$Interview with Barney Collins, Overseer of Carl Vinson's Farm, Nov. 12, 1967.
members had been on the staff for at least ten to fifteen years.
Miss Edna L. Lytte worked for Vinson for 30 years before she retired. When he retired in 1964 his present secretary, Mrs. Marguerite Maddox Phillips, had completed twenty years of service. It is said of him that he was very abrupt and demanding, when the work load was heavy, he was more often warm and friendly in his relationship with his staff. He detoured through their offices to talk with them, and to listen to, and to advise them, on their personal problems. At the beginning of each Congress he herded the committee staff into the first meeting and introduced them to new committee members as the best staff on Capital Hill. There is no record of his having hired a Negro to serve on his staff.

Although he lives on the "River Ridge Plantation," he also owns a historic 128 year old Milledgeville town house whose handsomely furnished rooms have stood unused (but carefully maintained) since Mrs. Vinson's death in 1950. If one should interview Mr. Vinson about his early life he quickly says that "you'll ruin your paper or story if you try to write about that," and insists that the interviewer stick to the record in Congress.

He represented the old Southern Congressman who felt that he worked for "the good of all the people." He prefers not to discuss his views of the Negro. His basic personal philosophy was that all men should have an opportunity to have all the assets of life open to him. Carl Vinson is now retired from public office, but in terms of evaluation of his work we can say that his service to his country was considerable in the area of national defense and security.
Senators, Congressmen, Governors, Judges, Solicitors-General and various other well-known and would be statesmen were among the many opponents who tried to unseat Congressman Vinson.

Ted Tippman summed up Vinson's career in the following way: A fine gentleman, a very effective congressman, an honorable and fair committee chairman. According to Lippman, his views on the race issue were known as conservative but for a man nearly 80 years old whose whole career had been based on politics in Georgia, he was remarkably free of any of the usual antagonistic feelings toward Negroes and liberal whites. Vinson supported President Johnson against Barry Goldwater in 1964, openly and forcefully. He never in the last part of his career descended to the level of debate on civil rights bills that was characteristic of Southern opposition to such bills. He is still remembered by many politicians as "Uncle Carl" and "Background Boss of the Pentagon," but with the people of Georgia he will always be remembered as one of Georgia's important personalities, one who made an impact on recent American History.

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