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MANHATTAN DISTRICT HISTORY
BOOK 1, GENERAL - VOLUME 2, AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES
CHAPTER 13, PREPARATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE SMITH REPORT

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MANHATTAN DISTRICT HISTORY

BOOK I, VOLUME 4, AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 13, PREPARATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE SMYTH REPORT

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~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

1. Title and Author.

The first published account of the developments and activities which led to the successful completion of the atomic bomb has been called the most important book of the century. It is commonly referred to as "The Smyth Report." When the document was originally issued to the general public (in lithoprinted form), in August 1945, it bore the formal title (Appendix, Reference 1):

**"A GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS
OF USING ATOMIC ENERGY FOR MILITARY PURPOSES
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
1940-1945"**

When it was republished in type-printed book form about a month later (the Princeton University Press Edition) the title read:

**"Atomic Energy for Military Purposes, the Official Report
on the Development of the Atomic Bomb, under the Auspices of the United
States Government, 1940-1945"**

A short time later, this book was published with its original title by the U. S. Government Printing Office, bearing the notation, "Publication authorized as of August 1945."

(The two later editions contained some minor revisions and additions; the Princeton University Press edition contained some photographs and additional appendices.)

This book was written by Dr. Henry DeWolf Smyth, Chairman of the Department of Physics of Princeton University, and consultant to the Manhattan District, at the request of Major General L. R. Groves, Commanding General of the Manhattan Project.

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2. Inception and Purpose.

It was in the early part of 1944 that it was decided by General Groves and Dr. J. B. Conant, with the concurrence of the Military Policy Committee, that an account of the work of the Manhattan District and of the previous work, preparatory thereto, of the Office of Solenoidal Research and Development - should be written, for the permanent records of the Government, for the acknowledgment of credit to those concerned, principally the scientists, and in anticipation of the pressing demand for information for the American people which would inevitably follow the successful attainment of the objective of the Project. (Ref. 2.1.)

General Groves and Dr. Conant asked Dr. E. D. Sneyth to undertake the writing task, knowing that he was inherently well qualified not only because of his writing ability but also because of his close association with the work of the Manhattan District and the ORND, in early as the summer of 1941, Dr. Sneyth had served as a member of the Uranium Committee - or, as it then became, the Uranium Section, of the Fuel Section - of the National Defense Research Council; he had been one of the first to suggest the possibility of large scale separation of uranium isotopes by electromagnetic means; and in the summer and fall of 1943 and the winter of 1944 he acted, first as associate director of the Metallurgical Laboratory at Chicago and, later, as consultant. (Ref. 1, 2.3.) In a letter dated 17 April 1944, General Groves wrote to Dr. Sneyth: 'It would be of great value to the project, for the responsibility of which I am charged, if you could undertake the work which we discussed the other day.'

Dr. Sneyth advised General Groves that he had decided to undertake the work, in a letter dated 21 April 1944, and General Groves so reported

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to the Military Policy Committee on 10 May 1944.

In a letter dated 13 May 1944, to the heads of the various important installations of the Manhattan District, General Groves described as follows the work which Dr. Smyth was undertaking, including the major purposes and the general scope of the proposed document:

'Dr. H. D. Smyth of Princeton University is writing a description of the entire project including the scientific credits to the various scientists who have been responsible for the different phases of the various developments. This description is designed for public release either in its entirety or in abbreviated form if and when it becomes necessary or desirable to explain to the American people what we have been doing, what we have accomplished and who is responsible for the achievements. The purpose is to give clearly and promptly public recognition to those who have worked so long and necessarily so anonymously.' (Ref. 1, E, 3.)

In his preface to the first edition of his report, dated 1 July 1945 (Ref. 1), Dr. Smyth thus described the purpose of the document:

'The document is responsible for our nation's policy with an eye to the citizens and they can discharge such responsibilities clearly only if they are informed. The average citizen cannot be expected to understand clearly how an atomic bomb is constructed or how it works but there is in this country a substantial group of engineers and scientific men who can understand such things and who can explain the potentialities of atomic bombs to their fellow citizens. The present report is written for this professional group and is a matter-of-fact, general account of work in the United States since 1939 aimed at the production of such bombs.'

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It is neither a documented official history nor a technical treatise for experts. Secrecy requirements have affected both the detailed content and general emphasis so that many interesting developments have been omitted."

3. Security Rules.

When Dr. Smyth first started to write his report, decision had not yet been made as to the ultimate use of the document. It was to be prepared with public release in mind, but the question of how much material, if any, should be eventually released was reserved for later decision. As Dr. Smyth has stated: "in preparing the report, I felt it was necessary to make it as complete as possible, with the idea that such material could be cut out or might be considered inappropriate for release." (Ref. 3.)

Following this policy, Dr. Smyth proceeded with the preparation of a draft of his report, visiting the various installations of the Manhattan District, conferring with the key men of the District, and collecting informative documents and other data bearing on the subject. All compartmentalizing security barriers with respect to Dr. Smyth were removed by General Groves to help him with this work. Rough drafts of various chapters of the report were from time to time submitted to, and discussed with, General Groves and Dr. Conant. Parts of the manuscript were discussed with many others. (Ref. 2,3.)

Dr. Smyth, General Groves and Dr. Conant held a conference in Washington on 16, 17 May 1945, after preliminary drafts of twelve out of thirteen chapters had been completed. At this conference General Groves and Dr. Conant decided that the report should definitely

to prepared for public release and 30 June 1945 was set as the target date for completion. (Ref. 3.)

At this time it was agreed that Dr. E. G. Kolman, Vice Chairman (under Dr. Conant, Chairman) of the National Defense Research Committee of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, and a close consultant to General Groves, should help Dr. Smyth in preparing the manuscript for publication, and that it would be necessary to derive a set of rules or criteria as a definite guide in determining what material should be included or excluded.

Dr. Bolman and Dr. Smyth prepared the desired set of rules.

Discussed them with General Groves, who discussed them further with Dr. Conant and approved them after they had been somewhat modified. General Groves then wrote a letter to Dr. Smyth, dated 21 May 1945, enclosing the approved set of rules, placing them on record as the official criteria for the report which was to be publicly released. (Ref. 2,3,4,5.)

These official rules, as edited for actual use, (identified in substance with those originally approved) read as follows (Ref. 2,3,4,5.):

Rules governing the scientific policies:

A. All matters connected with the dissemination of the actual bomb are to be excluded.

B. Any information disclosed must satisfy one of the detailed requirements in each of the two following groups.

1

(a) That it is important to a reasonable understanding of or what has been done on the project as a whole.

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(b) That it is of true scientific interest and likely to be of distinct help to scientific workers in this country.

and

II

(a) That it is already known generally by competent scientists.

SE

(b) That it can be deduced or guessed by competent scientists from what is already known, combined with the knowledge that the project was in the overall successful.

SE

(a) That it has no real bearing on the production of atomic bombs.

SE

(d) In a limited number of cases (see § which will be separately reported in detail), that it could be discovered by a small group (fifteen, of whom not over five would be senior men) of competent scientists working in a well equipped college laboratory in a year's time or less.

4. Review and Approval.

As indicated by General Groves in his letter of 21 May 1945 to Dr. Smyth, he appointed Dr. Weisman the principal reviewer of the manuscript.

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Dr. Folman was assisted by Drs. Paul O. Fine and W. S. Shurcliff, who served principally as editors. The work of these three men produced many changes in the document, but their unremitting labor together with that of Dr. Smyth made it possible to have a revised and mimeographed draft completed and ready for final review about the middle of July 1945. His efforts in completing the revision of the report prevented Dr. Smyth from witnessing the test in New Mexico on 16 July 1945. (Ref. 2.)

The security rules quoted above had already been applied to every statement in the report, but to make doubly sure that nothing had been overlooked, copies of pertinent sections were submitted to the scientists in the various parts of the project, for their final review of the subject matter and agreement with the security classification. (Ref. 3.)

Time was now growing short, as it was hoped that the report would be released simultaneously with the combat use of the bomb against Japan. To insure prompt action by the reviewing scientists and also for the all-important purpose of guarding the documents, which had to be kept highly secret until the bomb had been used, officer couriers transported the copies of the appropriate sections of the draft to the various reviewers, and in the usual case waited while the reviews were made. (Ref. 4.)

A letter accompanied each section of the report when it was sent out to the project leaders for this final check, reading as follows (Ref. 2.):

"TO: (Name of scientist concerned)

"FROM: Major General L. R. Groves

"RE: Report by H. D. Smyth

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"At my request, Professor H. D. Smyth of Princeton University has written a general report on 'Atomic Bombs'. This report of 1 July 1945 is intended for public release from Washington when the appropriate time comes. Until that time, the report and all parts of it are to be treated as highly secret and handled with special care.

"Attached are the following parts of Smyth's report: (Here followed designation of the part or parts of the report which dealt with the work under the purview of the addressee.) These parts have been brought to you by Officer Courier, who will wait until you have read them and will then return them to me.

"Please read these parts of the report as soon as possible. If you have any corrections, please have them typewritten and attached to the appropriate pages of the report. Enter below the page numbers where such corrections are indicated:...

"It would be appreciated if you would then sign the following statement:

"The attached portions of the report on 'Atomic Bombs' by H. D. Smyth meet with my approval.

"(I recommend the suggestions on the pages whose numbers are indicated be made.)

"Signed: _____

"Date: _____"

Each of these letters was accompanied by a copy of the security rules, quoted above. The statement of approval, with respect to varying portions of the report, was signed by the following: Dr. S. K. Allison, Dr. Walter Bartley, Dr. A. H. Compton, Dr. J. B. Conant, Dr. Donald

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Cocksey, Dr. A. J. Dempster, Dr. J. E. Dunning, Dr. Enrico Fermi, Dr. Norman Hilberry, Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence, Dr. E. S. Mulliken, Dr. Richard S. Tolman, Dr. H. G. Urey, Dr. H. T. Wenzel, Dr. E. P. Wigner, and Dr. W. K. Sien. (Ref. 2, 4.)

Suggestions for corrections or revisions accompanied the approvals of many of the scientists. There is in the record only one case of a key scientific leader failing to sign his approval because he demurred about the subject matter of a section of the report, but his objection involved no question from the security standpoint. On 31 July 1945, Dr. J. R. Oppenheimer, Chief of the Los Alamos Laboratory, sent the following teletype to General Groves (Ref. 2.):

"After further consideration believe that it would be better not to release that part of Smyth's statement which bears on this project, since it is a very one-sided account which actually gives a rather misleading impression of the nature of the work here. Think it would be better now to make a brief one or two line statement of the functions assigned to this part of the project. We shall attempt to prepare, according to my best understanding of security policy, a somewhat more rounded statement and shall submit it to you in the near future. I ask that Smyth's statement in chapter twelve not be released in the interval."

It was recognized that Dr. Oppenheimer's objections with respect to that portion of the report which dealt with the Los Alamos Laboratory were quite sound from his point of view, but that it would be difficult to remove his objections without violating the security rule which banned "all matters connected with the construction of the actual bomb". For this reason, and because Dr. Oppenheimer's comments on an earlier draft

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had been weighed and accepted when advisable. It was decided not to risk serious delay in the release of the report by rewriting the chapter to which he referred or by waiting for his revisions. (Ref. E, 4.)

One other scientist, Dr. Leo Ballard, to whom chapters II, III, and IV of the draft were submitted, deleted the words "most my approval" before signing the form, substituting a statement to the effect that his reading of the draft had been hurried and incomplete, and that he recommended four corrections which he had handed to Dr. A. R. Shapton's office. These corrections, together with all other recommendations and suggestions made by the reviewing scientists, received careful consideration and were adopted whenever advisable.

Two signatures of several other scientists were sought but not obtained, because they were temporarily absent from their stations or were not available for other reasons: Dr. F. E. Ingerson (part of chapter 8), Dr. L. O. Jacobson (part of chapter 8), and Dr. G. F. Ashbore (chapter 4 and part of chapter 6). (Ref. E.)

On 25 July 1945, the authors took of revising the draft and incorporating all possible changes suggested by the reviewing scientists was completed. The final typing of this stage was performed under great pressure, and it was necessary to fly some of the Manhattan District's stenographers up to Washington from Oak Ridge in order to get it done in the time allowed. As a part of the editorial revision, Dr. Tolman re-read every word of the report with extreme care, marking all passages that could conceivably be questioned on the grounds of security, and giving justification for publishing them by reference to the security rules. Dr. Smyth and Dr. Tolman then went over these particular passages together

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and prepared a joint memorandum for General Groves (dated 31 July 1945), discussing them. (Ref. 2,4.)

The following quotations from this memorandum clearly indicate the care with which the manuscript had been scrutinized (Ref. 2):

"2. In considering security matters, we have assumed that it is definitely intended that the report should disclose the fact of the usefulness of both uranium 235 and plutonium 239 for the construction of atomic bombs, and should give a general account of the methods used for the production of these materials. Without such disclosure, a report of the kind requested could not have been written at all, and the activities of the industrial companies involved in production could not have been described or properly recognized.

"3. With regard to the nature of the actual bombs, we have mentioned the possibility of gun assembly since this is a possible method of assembly that occurs at once to anyone. We have, however, left it vague as to whether gun assembly was actually employed, and have made no mention of the implosion method of assembly. We have also allowed no mention of the presence of plutonium 240 in the manufactured material, nor of its undesirable properties.

"4. Included in the report is a section on the "Pile-Poisoning Crisis", par. 3.54-3.59, which describes the experience at Hanford when the pile initially failed to operate at the expected high power levels because of Xenon poisoning. This is the only item, to which attention has been called by Project Leaders or others, as possibly giving information which does not come under the security rules as laid down by your office. The section makes no statement as to the isotopes responsible

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for the poisoning, and we have retained the section, on this basis that it is important to a reasonable understanding of what has been done on the project as a whole, and that the possibility of some such poisoning might have been guessed beforehand by competent scientists, and indeed was so guessed by competent engineers.

"5. As a final task, we have gone over the manuscript, especially from the security angle, and checked all items which might seem doubtful to see that they do agree with the security rules as given on the attached sheet.

"6. As a result of our final check, we are able to state that all items of information disclosed do agree with the general rule A, and also with the special provisions of rule B as laid down by your office. This agreement is to be understood in the light of the remarks made in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4. In connection with the satisfactory outcome of this final check, it is of interest to note that there have been no objections, on security grounds, by Project Leaders or others, to the items included, except for the item mentioned in paragraph 4.

"7. For your information, the following table gives a partial list of items in the text, which we think might seem doubtful from the security angle, and gives the applicable provisions under rule B by which their inclusion is justified. References to published material are included in the table when appropriate (i.e., when item is justified under B(II)a)."

(There follows a table headed "Applicable Provisions under Rule B", in which some 38 items are listed. For 12 of these items, subparagraph "b" of security rule "B(I)" is cited as applicable; for the other

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26/ items, subparagraph "a" of "B(I)" is cited. With regard to the security rule provisions under "B(II)", for 7 items, subparagraph "a"; for 17 items, subparagraph "b"; for 9 items, subparagraph "c"; and for 5 items subparagraph "d" is cited.)

"8. In accordance with the foregoing table, it will be noted that there are five items which have been included, as justified under B(II)d, on the basis that the information could be discovered within a year by a small group of competent scientists, working in a well equipped college laboratory. These items may be more completely described as follows:-

- "Par. 6.12, the usefulness of ether extraction for the purification of uranium oxide
- "Par. 6.16, the usefulness of metallic calcium for the reduction of uranium tetrafluoride
- "Par. 6.17, the usefulness of metallic magnesium for the same purpose
- "Par. 6.34, the properties of the plutonium 238 isotope
- "Par. 6.73, the usefulness of (IV) and (VI) states of oxidation of plutonium for chemical purification."

The matter of pile poisoning, described in paragraph 4 of the memorandum from Dr. Smyth and Dr. Helman, quoted above, was probably the subject of more discussion than any other. In a later high-level conference (described hereinafter) General Groves said he felt that it might perhaps be better to delete this section but that he did not think it made much difference. It was finally deleted and did not appear in the published document. Also, some of the items described in paragraph 5 of the memorandum, those justified under par B(II)d of the security rules, were revised or modified before final publication. (Ref. 2.)

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all parts conformed to the special rules - it was suggested that the collection of all these facts in a logical, well-arranged document might in fact summarize the information in a way which would be helpful to a competitor country. Dr. Genant and General Groves both emphasized that the aid to any nation conceivably capable of duplicating the bomb would be negligible, if it existed at all. They pointed out again that the information which would come out in a series of shorter releases, over which control would be extremely difficult, would be likely to be more revealing. (Ref. 3.)

After this conference, on 4 August 1945, Sir James Chadwick, who had expressed the greatest doubts as to the wisdom of releasing the report as it then read, addressed a letter to Field Marshal Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, Chief of the British Joint Staff Mission to the United States, in which he set forth his views on the matter. He wrote, "After thorough consideration I state that this report conforms to the rules which have been agreed upon as governing the release of scientific information, with a liberal, but not strained or forced, interpretation of clauses II(b) and II(d)." (Ref. 2,4.)

Then, after describing the concerns he had originally felt on first reading the report, Dr. Chadwick stated that he had discussed the matter with General Groves and Dr. Tolman and said, "I am now convinced that the very special circumstances arising from the nature of the project and of its organization demand special treatment, and that a report of this kind may well be necessary in order to maintain security on the really essential facts of the project... To judge how far one must go in meeting the thirst of the general public for information and the itch of

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those with knowledge to give it away so as to preserve secrecy on vital matters is indeed difficult, but so far as I am competent to express an opinion I find myself broadly in agreement with my U. S. Colleagues."

(Ref. 2,4.)

Dr. Chadwick went on to say that information divulged would be useful to foreign governments or others interested in atomic energy development, "not because any one item of information is particularly important but from the illuminating effect of a well-arranged, coherent, and well-written presentation of the development of the many aspects of this project." He continued: "At the same time, I would agree that such assistance to possible competitors is not as much as one might think at first sight; it is indeed more apparent than real.

"I have tried to form an estimate of this assistance as a saving in time to a competitor making a serious attempt to develop the... project. I believe that the saving might amount to a few months, say three. It could hardly be more.

"It is for others to assess the danger in giving this degree of assistance to a foreign power against the danger of a loss of security on the vital aspects of the project." (Ref. 2,4.)

Finally, the Smyth Report was brought to the President himself for approval of its release. In the conference with the President, a minority pointed out that release might subject the administration to criticism. Mr. Truman stated that he was already used to criticism and that release would have to be governed by what was best for the country. The majority of the advisers present urged him to publish the report and he gave his final approval accordingly. (Ref. 4.)

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5. Release.

Before the first combat bomb was detonated over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, and before the President's final approval had been obtained, the Smyth Report had been lithographed, with the use of the Pentagon Top Secret reproduction facilities. One thousand copies were run off and these were all kept locked up by General Groves' staff. (Ref. 6.)

Soon after the President gave his approval, the report was re-issued, for the Sunday morning newspapers of 12 August 1945 and for use by radio broadcasters after 9 P.M., EST, 11 August 1945.

The release was made through the War Department Bureau of Public Relations, Press Branch, accompanied by the following statement:

"Nothing in this report discloses necessary military secrets as to the manufacture or production of the weapon. It does provide a summary of generally known scientific facts and gives an account of the history of the work, and of the role played in the development of different scientific and industrial organizations.

"The past interests of the United States require the utmost cooperation by all concerned in keeping secret now and for all time in the future all scientific and technical information not given in this report or other official releases of information by the War Department.

"The following addition should be made to paragraph 12.15 of the Smyth Report: 'The War Department now authorizes the further statement that the bomb is detonated in combat at such a height above the ground as to give the maximum blast effect against structures, and to disseminate the radioactive products as a cloud. An account of the height of the explosion practically all the radioactive products are carried

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upward in the ascending column of hot air and dispersed harmlessly over a wide area. Even in the New Mexico test, where the height of explosion was necessarily low, only a very small fraction of the radioactivity was deposited immediately below the bomb.¹⁰

In Book I, Volume 4, Chapter 6, "Press Releases", a copy of the above statement and a copy of the first edition of the Smyth Report itself may be found (Nos. 31 and 31a respectively). That chapter also contains copies of the press releases issued just after the bombing of Hiroshima, by the President and the Secretary of War, on 6 August 1945 (Nos. 1 and 2 respectively).

The 1000 copies of the report were exhausted within a few days. 2000 more copies were quickly printed, and these also were soon distributed. Then followed, in September, the Princeton University Press edition and the Government Printing Office edition, which already have been mentioned. (Ref. 6.)

6. Credit and Criticism.

It had been anticipated that, despite the extreme care which was exercised to insure that the credit given by Dr. Smyth in his report to various individuals and organizations for their contributions to the enterprise was accurate and fair, there would be a certain amount of disagreement and dissatisfaction, which would inevitably result in complaints and criticisms. With the publication of the report, such objections began to come in. Some of the objections were found upon examination by Dr. Smyth to be fair and reasonable and they were met by making minor revisions and additions for the later editions of the report. Other objections remained, and must be regarded simply as differences of opinion

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between individuals. (Ref. 2.)

While the award of credit, principally to the scientists, had been one of the major purposes of the report from the very beginning, it had also been recognized that this matter would involve difficulties which might be impossible to overcome completely. At one time Dr. Smyth considered seriously the possibility of adding appendices to the report in which all the professional personnel associated with the project and its various parts would be listed, with a designation of the organization to which each one belonged. He also proposed that a brief biographical sketch be included of each of those mentioned in the text. It soon became obvious, however, that such appendices would be undesirably voluminous; it was also realized that the difficulties of attaining the desired accuracy and the chances of disagreement and criticism would be multiplied. Therefore, these proposals were abandoned. (Ref. 2.)

Some 22 persons have been mentioned in the Smyth Report (Princeton Edition), and thus given credit as individuals for their contributions. 22 of the principal contractors are mentioned, and about 25 universities, as well as numbers of other cooperating organizations - laboratories, Government bureaus, etc. On the whole, and especially considering the difficulties inherent in the situation, the report was extraordinarily successful in its efforts to distribute credit fairly and accurately. Nevertheless, a few persons or organizations may have been overlooked and others, on the borderline, may perhaps be justified in feeling slighted. Award of credit in a case of this kind may be represented by the ~~circumference~~ of concentric circles: The greater the number of persons mentioned, the greater the additional number of borderline

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names which might also have been mentioned. For example, if 500 persons, instead of 222, had been named, there would probably have been a far greater number feeling slighted. All those who took part, however, whether specifically named or not, are entitled to their full share of the credit expressed by General Groves when he wrote, in his foreword to the Smyth Report: "The success of the development is due to the many thousands of scientists, engineers, workmen and administrators - both civilian and military - whose prolonged labor, silent perseverance, and whole-hearted cooperation have made possible the unprecedented technical accomplishments here described," (Ref. 1.)

Other criticisms were voiced by a few people who thought that the Smyth Report had disclosed too much information and that its release had consequently endangered the security of the nation. The question raised by Dr. Chadwick which was quoted in an earlier paragraph - "the illuminating effect of a well-arranged, coherent, and well-written presentation of the development of the many aspects of this project" - was the basis of some of the general criticisms. Others, however, were more specific; for example, although it was universally admitted that the disclosure of the fact that the project was successful had been unavoidable and this was recognized as the most important single item of information which would be helpful to a competitor, nevertheless it was maintained that there was no sound reason to disclose also the fact that EVERY ONE of the methods of production of fissionable material which had been put into large scale production had been successful.

The most serious activity in the way of criticism of the publication of the Smyth Report from the standpoint of security occurred dur-

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ing 1947, when the newspapers took up some statements made by a few important individuals - sometimes only half-statements which had been misinterpreted - and argued the question at considerable length. As this took place after the end of the period covered by the Manhattan District History, it lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

It would probably have been impossible to prepare for publication any document descriptive of the work of the Manhattan District which all readers, of widely varying knowledge of the subject, would have agreed was wise and not in any way harmful to the national interest. This was recognized beforehand by those who were concerned with the preparation and issuance of the Smyth Report and was accepted as inevitable. The most impressive proof of justification of the publication is the fact that all those who had the greatest knowledge of the subject were so nearly unanimous in approving its publication as finally written.

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Appendix

References

(NDH:Manhattan District History; AFSWP:Armed Forces Special Weapons Project)

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