



# UCU The Strange Death of James Forrestal

## Part 1

by Peter Robbins

Between the years of 1938 and 1949, few individuals on the national or international stage commanded more attention or wielded more power than James Forrestal. His service as a member of FDR's "Kitchen Cabinet" helped speed the end of the Great Depression, and his tireless efforts as Undersecretary and then Secretary of the Navy contributed significantly to winning the war at sea.

When faced with the gargantuan task of dismantling the arcane Department of War and creating a modern, unified Department of Defense, it was Jim Forrestal that President Truman turned to. In his

role as that department's first secretary, Forrestal was a key architect of our modern defense establishment and set the policies that defined much of the Cold War from its inception on. He oversaw the birth of the United States Air Force, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, and the beginnings of both our modern national security state and our modern age of UFOs.

Throughout this period his policies and public statements held great sway in this country and abroad. They were also the subject of regular print and broadcast news coverage and commentary. But ask the great majority of Americans today

who he was and they will likely draw a blank, and with good cause. Excluding a handful of noteworthy exceptions, he has effectively been written out of the history books and out of our national consciousness, an Orwellian bit of historical revisionism if ever there was one. How and why did this quiet purge occur, and did the man who created our modern Department of Defense take his own life, or was it taken from him?

If we are to accept the official account, early on the morning of May 22, 1949, Secretary Forrestal took his own life by going out of a 16th-floor window at the Bethesda Naval Hospital where he was being treated for depression. But the accepted account that he died a suicide does not hold up under examination. It's my contention that the first Secretary of Defense was murdered, and by an individual or individuals working at the behest of powerful persons within the Truman Administration, with or without the express permission or awareness of the President.

## Concern With UFOs

Forrestal's death was precipitated by a profound nervous breakdown. He was a complex, driven individual who over the years assumed tremendous responsibilities in his public life while his private life suffered. A number of causes likely contributed to his emotional collapse, but an officially overlooked factor no doubt related to his far-reaching knowledge of UFO reality, the extraterrestrial implications of same, and his inability, in his capacity

as Secretary of Defense, to impact on this national security concern in any manner whatsoever.

While this treatment of his story must be compressed and abbreviated, it is nonetheless important to have a real sense of who this man was, even if in bullet point format, and of the gravity of the situation he inherited when he was sworn in as America's first Secretary of Defense on September 17, 1947.

## Early Accomplishments

Forrestal was born into an Irish-American family in 1892 in Dutchess County, New York, his father a contractor active in local Democratic Party activities, his mother a teacher at a nearby Catholic school. He attended Dartmouth in 1911 and transferred to Princeton in 1912.

Forrestal left Princeton three weeks prior to graduating to join a Wall Street brokerage firm, then enlisted in the Navy in 1916. He trained to be a flier but the armistice precluded his seeing action.

Forrestal returned to the States late 1918 and to the employ of the same firm. He became a partner in 1923 and president in 1926. That same year he married *Vogue* writer and former Ziegfeld showgirl Josephine Ogden. The couple had two sons, but neither proved very good at parenting; both had affairs and took lovers.

Forrestal prospered on Wall Street through the Depression. His financial skills brought him to the attention of Franklin Roosevelt, who invited him to join a select group of business leaders who advised the



President Truman decorates Forrestal.

President on economic matters. Forrestal took this call to public service seriously. He put his business life on hold and moved to Washington.

Forrestal was appointed Undersecretary of the Navy in 1940 and was soon directing and overseeing the manufacture and flow of all the Navy's war needs—superbly, by all accounts.

Forrestal became the administration's point man in securing and finalizing the so-called Lend Lease Agreement by which the British were advanced millions of tons of badly-needed war materiel.

He was sworn in as Secretary of the Navy in 1944. In this position, he put himself in harm's way more than once. He was present at the Battles of Leyte Gulf, the Solomons, and the Normandy invasion.

Following the cessation of hostilities, Truman asked the Army and Navy to submit plans for unification of the armed forces. Truman favored the Navy's plan and appointed Forrestal to head up the creation

of a new Department of Defense. Forrestal saw the job through to successful completion despite ongoing interservice rivalries.

On June 24, 1947, Kenneth Arnold's Washington State UFO sighting became the subject of international press coverage and initiated the so-called modern age of UFOs. Then, on or about the fourth of July, something, or things, crashed in the plains of New Mexico less than 80 miles from Roswell, home of the world's only Atomic Bomb Wing. Forty-eight hours later the story was international news.

### Secretary of Defense

The National Security Act was passed by Congress on July 26, and the President immediately named Forrestal as his nominee for the the post of Secretary of Defense. Then on September 17, 1947, en route from a state visit to Brazil, Truman sent a message instructing that Forrestal be sworn in immediately. Why? General Nathan Twining's "Air Materiel Command Opinion Concerning Flying Discs" is dated only six days later and states, "The phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious." That same day, September 23, Forrestal arrived at his new offices in the Pentagon. The next day was September 24.

The Eisenhower Briefing Document of November 18, 1952, is generally considered the least controversial of the so-called MJ-12 documents, but if authentic, it confirms at the least U.S. awareness of



an extraterrestrial presence, the crash at Roswell, and the creation on September 24, 1947, of a "TOP SECRET Research and Development Intelligence operation responsible directly and only to the President of the United States." James Forrestal is listed as number three of the twelve men named to this group.

The Briefing Document came with a one-page attachment that authorized the new Defense Secretary to proceed "with all due speed and caution upon your undertaking." Three days later Forrestal issued his first directive as Secretary of Defense and the Air Force was activated.

On January 7, 1948, Capt. Thomas Mantell and two other Kentucky Air National Guard pilots were scrambled after a UFO "of tremendous size" was reported in the skies near Fort Knox. Mantell was killed when his plane exploded in an uncontrolled descent.

By mid-October 1948 victory seemed all but assured for the Republican presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey. Forrestal confided to a friend that he was deeply concerned that "since Dewey might be elected President, his representatives should be briefed in preparation for the possibility." But his common-sense proposal drew the resentment of administration officials, who equated it with disloyalty to the President, and by late November, Secretary Forrestal's star was in decline at the White House.

He tendered his resignation on March 3 and met with Truman on the tenth. At

that time the secretary requested that White House personnel take possession of his multithousand-page "diary," given the amount of classified material it contained. The White House acquiesced.

### The Breakdown

On March 28, the day of his retirement, Forrestal joined Defense Department employees assembled to see his replacement sworn in. Here President Truman presented him with the Distinguished Service Medal, the highest civilian decoration authorized by Congress. Unable to respond to the President's generous words of praise, he was led speechless from the room.

Following the ceremonies, Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington, who had regularly challenged Forrestal's authority, spoke with him. The effect on Forrestal was deeply upsetting, if not traumatic. He was found at his desk several hours later staring at the wall and repeating the phrase "You are a loyal fellow. You are a loyal fellow..."

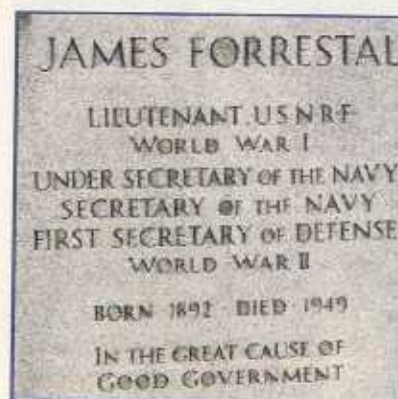
He was driven back to his Georgetown home where his friend Ferdinand Eberstadt soon arrived. Eberstadt, taken aback by his old friend's manner, recalled Forrestal's telling him that he was a total failure and was considering suicide. It seemed Forrestal was also convinced that certain persons in the White House had formed a conspiracy to "get him" and had finally succeeded.

On April 2, Forrestal and Eberstadt flew to Florida where their friend Robert Lovett

# The Strange Death of James Forrestal

## Part 2

by Peter Robbins



**Synopsis:** On May 22, 1949, retired Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal jumped out a 16th-floor window at Bethesda Naval Hospital. His hospitalization was preceded by a nervous breakdown, perhaps brought about by his knowledge of UFO reality and his inability to affect government policy in this regard. Did he know too much? Did he commit suicide, or was he murdered?

Official accounts of Forrestal's death vary slightly but follow this basic line:

While staff psychiatrist Cmdr. R. R. Deen was asleep in the room next to Forrestal's, a day shift attendant, Hospital Apprentice R.W. Harrison, looked in on the secretary at about 1:45 a.m. to find the patient awake and copying a Sophocles poem out of a poetry anthology. Harrison asked Forrestal if he would like a sleeping pill, but it was

declined. Harrison then reported to Commander Deen's room (though according to another account he reported to the hospital security station on another floor) and updated the officer on the patient's condition. Harrison allegedly forgot to lock Forrestal's door behind him at 1:45. When he checked the room again at 1:50 it was empty and a search commenced.

The seventh-floor duty nurse then reported hearing a loud sound from her window. It was Forrestal's body hitting the third-floor roof. Hospital authorities surmised the patient, finding his door unlocked, walked across the hall to the efficiency kitchen, pushed open the unsecured screen window, knotted his bathrobe sash tightly around his neck, tied the free end to the radiator below the window, then lowered himself out of the window and was killed when the knot at the radiator end of the sash slipped its mooring.

had an estate. Over the next three days Forrestal attempted to take his life several times and the Navy sent Capt. George M. Raines to Florida. Raines was Chief of Neuropsychiatry at the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland. But an examination would have to wait. Forrestal's family had asked Dr. William C. Menninger to be psychiatrist of record, and as such Raines was duty-bound to wait until Menninger arrived the next day.

### Bethesda

The following afternoon the doctors examined the patient, consulted, and concluded the best course of action was confinement at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Menninger, now officially Forrestal's psychiatrist, then flew back to his clinic, and while regularly briefed, he never saw his patient again.

Dr. Raines accompanied Forrestal from Florida to Maryland, and on the drive from the airfield to the hospital Forrestal had to be restrained from throwing himself from the moving car. Once admitted and secured in a room on the 16th floor, a 24-hour Marine guard was put on his door. For much of the first month the patient was kept heavily sedated.

A week passed with no mention of Forrestal's breakdown or hospitalization in the press or on the radio. *The New York Times* first ran the story on April 8 and noted that doctors were "very much encouraged by the former Defense Secretary's response to care."

One of the first people Forrestal called when he was allowed phone privileges was Monsignor Maurice J. Sheehy, a highly regarded prelate at the Catholic University in Washington. Although he had drifted from the church over the years, Forrestal asked the Monsignor to help him return to it. Sheehy of course agreed and planned an initial visit to Bethesda.

While at Bethesda, Forrestal phoned the White House insistent that someone be sent over to check for a bug (listening device) in the wall of his room. The White House sent Sidney Souers, the first secretary of the National Security Council and a future director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Admiral Souers was one of Harry Truman's closest confidants and advisors.

Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson visited Forrestal on April 27 and reported his predecessor looked fine and "should be out of the hospital in two to three weeks." Also on April 27 the Air Force distributed copies of "Project Saucer," its desensitized civilian version of Project SIGN, to the press.

On May 17 the *Times* reported that Forrestal had gained 12 pounds since being confined on April 2. By that time visitors and hospital personnel alike seemed in agreement that the secretary's condition was improving.

Henry Forrestal decided that his brother should complete his recovery privately in the countryside and made plans to travel to Washington on May 22. He tele-

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Newspapers worldwide headlined the tragedy on May 23. Two days later Josephine Forrestal returned to Washington from Paris where she had been for the entire duration of her husband's illness. Her first public act was to absolve everyone of blame in her husband's death, this without benefit of even a cursory investigation. That afternoon, with 6,000 in attendance, James Forrestal was buried at Arlington Cemetery with full military honors, including a 19-howitzer salute. He was 57 years old.

July 19th's *New York Times* reported that "Considerable mystery surrounds a delay in releasing the report made by the special naval investigating board that inquired into the death of James V. Forrestal." The board began its hearings on May 23 but concluded them after only seven days. For the next two weeks Navy and National Military Establishment press sections promised to release the report but did not.

On September 23 the public first learned of the existence of Forrestal's diary and found that it was being held at the White House for safekeeping. It was described as filling an entire filing cabinet and included copies of numerous secret and top secret classified documents.

Navy Secretary Matthews made public the investigating board's report absolving "all" of any blame in Forrestal's death on October 11. It states in part "that the death was not caused in any manner by the intent, fault, negligence, or inefficiency of any person or persons in the naval service or connected therewith." Such language sug-

gests the Navy was more concerned with protecting itself than pursuing the matter actually under investigation. The report concluded that the body found on the third-floor ledge was Forrestal's, that he died of injuries sustained in the fall, that his behavior prior to death "was indicative of a mental depression," and "that the treatment and precautions in the conduct of the case were in agreement with accepted psychiatric practice and commensurate with the evident status of the patient at all times."

Driving home the "casualty of war"/"occupational fatigue" rationale by both government and media greatly helped Americans accept Forrestal's death as a suicide, and there was little cause to feel otherwise. And give or take, this "operational fatigue" can be traced to the time he was sworn in as Secretary of Defense. Forrestal's friend, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Arthur Krock, recalled, "From the time of his appointment as Secretary of Defense in 1947, my wife had begun to detect inner disturbances in Forrestal that I had not." And writing in late 1949, columnist Drew Pearson noted in his memoirs that "the Defense Secretary's nervous deterioration dated back over two years." Both observations, one from a good friend, the other from an outspoken enemy, support the fact that Forrestal's mental problems began about the time he was sworn in.

### The Forrestal Diary

In 1951 the Viking Press published a massively edited version of Forrestal's diaries that quickly became a national best-

seller, is a scholarly and insightful work for which the author interviewed many who were closest to Forrestal, including Dean Acheson, Clark Clifford, Louis Johnson, Robert Lovett, Arthur Krock, Henry Forrestal, Dr. William Menninger, Dr. George Raines, and Harry S. Truman. Rogow was anything but a conspiracist, but early on in his narrative writes, "Officially of course, Forrestal committed suicide on May 22, 1949, but among those close to him, there are even a few that are certain he was murdered, or if not murdered, that his death was very much desired by individuals and groups who in 1949 held great power in the United States."

### Aftermath

In assuming the mantle of Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal was charged with being "the principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to national security" (emphasis mine). He had authority to establish military policy and programs and held power over all the service branches. Yet despite every conceivable effort, the military forces he commanded remained unable to either confront or gain significant knowledge of the aerial unknowns—UFOs.

I am convinced that once James Forrestal broke under the strain, he saw the writing on the wall and knew that if he did not "do the right thing"—that is, kill himself—that others would certainly do it for him. But once his darkest days began to fall away, and the prescribed therapy ac-

tually began to produce results, the patient on the 16th floor grew stronger and began to recover his sense of self and his will to live. This turn of events seems to have sealed his fate. He died seven weeks after suffering the breakdown, was buried, eulogized, then pretty much forgotten.

To that select group who held power in this country at the middle of the last century, James Forrestal's mental collapse had to be treated as a priority national security matter. They had little understanding or appreciation of psychiatry and certainly could not trust it to cure their problem: this man knew everything and might say anything. The decision to force Forrestal out of that window was in no way personal. It was simply the only way to guarantee the resolution of what this group would have come to perceive as a potential security risk of the first magnitude.

History has shown James Forrestal to have been a true patriot in word and deed, but when he was interred at Arlington, more than his body was laid to rest. His accomplishments (and failures) should be better known to Americans, and I hope in time they will be.

Do we have enough evidence to legally establish that James Forrestal was murdered? No, not yet.

*Peter Robbins is the co-author, with Larry Warren, of Left at East Gate (Marlowe & Company).*



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### The Forrestal Diary

In 1951 the Viking Press published a massively edited version of Forrestal's diaries that quickly became a national best-

seller where I was, feeling intense guilt. It was like I was asking for forgiveness from the king.

Then I became aware of movement around me—lots of people walking, but as though they were in a fog. I was still concentrating on the balcony and where my friends had hung, but I was slowly seeing other things. A modern-looking woman stepped in front of me. She seemed surprised to see me and I felt pity from her. She told me that the balcony wasn't there anymore, and the beam was also gone. As she spoke, the ancient scene before me disappeared.

At this time I believe I was set free. After waking and thinking about the dream, I believe I experienced a death. I believe that I, as the laborer, was killed from behind as I supplicated the king for his life. I didn't know I had died until a woman saw my ghost or felt my spirit and told me it was time to move on.—*Cindy Morrill, Westelry R.I.*

### Forrestal and Conspiracies

Congratulations on the James V. Forrestal article (Part 1) in the August 2004 issue of FATE. The only other people I know of to have the guts to publish the truth about James V. Forrestal's murder are Milton William Cooper and Borderland Sciences.

Surely you are aware that the Congress passed legislation that makes the CIA and the NSA immune from prosecution of crimes. Our government has rubbed out

a lot of threatening persons: James V. Forrestal, Vincent Foster, at least 50 people connected with William Jefferson Clinton, about 250 people connected with the JFK assassination, Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, Dorothy Killgallen, Wilhelm Reich, Dr. Howard Jessup, Dr. McDonald, Congressman McDonald, Vickie Morgan, Marilyn Monroe, Timothy McVeigh, Don Harris (Chief of NBC Network News), the actor William Holden, the actor Gig Young and his wife.

Did you know that our president Richard M. Nixon was held against his will in the same U.S. Navy Hospital at Bethesda, Maryland back in the 1970s? Only because he acquiesced and agreed to resign kept him from being thrown out the window just like James V. Forrestal.

Why does the government continually hush up U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Parton's report on the Oklahoma City Alfred P. Murrah Building bombing?

Cleverly using deputy sheriffs in Arizona, the CIA murdered Milton William Cooper, a great American, on his own ranch in Arizona a few years ago.

Pan Am Flight 103 was all about a CIA feud—Libya was chosen to be the fall guy. How about Korean Airlines Flight KAL 007 being shot down deliberately? Would you care to guess which prominent American was on-board? Can you guess who ordered the airliner to be destroyed? Do you remember the mysterious death of Gloria Ramirez at the hospital in Riverside, California, about ten years ago—and its sub-

seller. *The Times* characterized it as "...a wealth of observations made just prior to and after World War II by a man who, aside from standing at the center of great events, was acknowledged to be an accurate observer of the history of his time." Its 581 pages were drawn from the over 2,800 pages alleged to be the full extent of Forrestal's writings. But a September 23, 1949, article in *The Times* stated, "The journal fills a whole filing cabinet, it is said, and is accompanied by many documents that still are stamped top secret." It takes a lot more than 2,800 pages to fill a standard four- or five-drawer filing cabinet, and 15,000 to 20,000 pages is a more realistic estimate of the diary's actual size.

### Murder or Suicide

*New York Times* features reporter Walter H. Waggoner was the lead journalist assigned to the story immediately following the tragedy. Within hours of Forrestal's plunge Waggoner established the following:

1. "The sash of his dressing-gown was still knotted and wrapped tightly around his neck when he was found, but hospital officials would not speculate as to its purpose."

2. "Mr. Forrestal had copied most of the Sophocles poem from the book, but he had apparently been interrupted in his efforts. His copying stopped after he had written 'night' of the word 'nightingale.'"

3. "...reports from his doctors and hospital authorities had indicated steady

progress toward his recovery."

4. "It had been accepted that continued treatment would have brought Mr. Forrestal to complete recovery in a matter of months."

5. "On the window sill from which Mr. Forrestal jumped were marks suggesting he might have changed his mind and tried to climb back in the window."

Why was Hospital Apprentice R.W. Harrison, who had not been assigned to Forrestal previously, assigned to him on this particular night? One account has it that the regularly assigned attendant did not appear for his shift due to drunkenness, something which had never happened before.

Then there is the matter of Monsignor Sheehy. Forrestal had expressed a desire to return to the Church, and by implication to the sanctity of the confessional. From the point of view of anyone who considered Forrestal a security risk or potential security risk, Father Sheehy would have been the last person the secretary should have been allowed to speak with. And in six attempts to see him, the monsignor never got beyond the reception area.

On May 20, Henry Forrestal informed the naval hospital that he intended to take his brother out of Bethesda on Sunday, May 22, to recuperate privately. Following James's death that morning, Henry became convinced that his brother had been murdered, and he wasn't alone in this belief.

Arnold A. Rogow's book, *James Forrestal: A Study of Personality, Politics and Pol-*

ner of my moccasin. Taking my foot out I really got a surprise. There in plain sight was my nice, solid metal bracelet. Just minutes before it was on my right arm, and then it was in the bottom of my footwear.

Now tell me, how could this happen? There was no way this could fall in my moccasin. There was no room for it.

Sounds like magic but I am not a musician. Maybe FATE readers have had this experience too?

I am a FATE subscriber and have been reading it for a long, long time. I find it to be quite interesting.—*John M. Mason, Grandview, Mo.*

### Past-Life Dreams

I have just finished reading Douglas De Long's article "Past-Life Pain" in the May 2004 magazine. I have experienced past life dreams myself, or at least I think that's what they were.

I was pregnant at the time, which I believe may have enhanced my intuition. The first dream I had was very vivid, and stayed in my head for days afterward.

In this dream, I was a laborer...that's the only way I can explain it. My job was to work in stone, I believe. I was a man, but I don't know if I had a family or not. I had the feeling that I was just doing what I had to do. I wasn't a "ladies man" or anything like that.

I was working in what seemed to be a castle. The way I interpreted the dream was that there was a beautiful red-haired princess who lived in the castle. Her father,

the king, had been introducing suitors to her so that she could be married. When she saw me, she decided that she wanted me.

I was somewhat upset by this. I did not want to upset the king, and I understood that returning the princess's affections would be disastrous for me. I did everything I could to stay away from her. I would turn away and not speak to her whenever we came into contact.

The princess began turning away her suitors and locked herself in her chambers. I saw all this as if I were watching a TV show. The king found out that she was refusing her suitors because she wanted to be with me.

At this time, I returned to my laborer's body. I was called before the king. He said that this was a terrible crime that I had committed. (These were not his words, but my interpretation of the feelings that I got in the dream; there were no words that I can remember, really.) He found that just hanging me would not be punishment enough. I was forced to round up my three closest friends and my brother. I was forced to hang them myself. I watched as the best friends I had in my life died by my hand.

Then I was in a courtyard. I knelt down and looked up to where the king was standing in a balcony. I also looked at the beam from which my brother and friends had hung. I knelt there for a very long time.

Things became blurry, and the courtyard was not as defined as it had been. The king did not move, and then he seemed to disappear. I felt like I could not move; I just