

AF Fires Costs Expert Who Told of C-5 Overrun

By Bernard D. Nossiter
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The Pentagon yesterday fired A. Ernest Fitzgerald the Air Force efficiency expert who first disclosed the \$2-billion cost overrun on the C-5A.

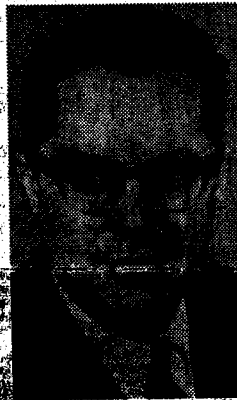
Fitzgerald, 43, was told his \$31,000-a-year job was being abolished to save money and that no other was available for him. In civil service parlance, he was the victim of a reduction in force.

An Air Force spokesman said there is "absolutely no" link between Fitzgerald's dismissal and his testimony a year ago on the big cargo plane before a Senate Joint Economic subcommittee.

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.), chairman of the subcommittee, called the firing a "reprisal." He said his unit will inquire into it.

Air Force Explains

Proxmire declared: "The firing of A. E. Fitzgerald is a clear message from the Pentagon to its employees. That message is, 'Do not try to reduce costs; do not aim towards efficiency; do not attempt to achieve economy in government; if you do, you will be isolated and fired.'"



A. ERNEST FITZGERALD
... job abolished

The Air Force said that Fitzgerald's was one of 650 jobs abolished to economize. Proxmire charged that this was "a mockery of the term."

Fitzgerald is an industrial engineer who came to the Air Force in September, 1965, as deputy for management systems to the service's assistant secretary for financial management. He was charged with holding down costs on big weapons systems.

His troubles began soon

after he told the Proxmire committee on November 13, 1968, that costs of the 120 C-A planes and spare parts the Air Force expected to buy were soaring nearly \$2 billion above their original estimate of \$3.4 billion. The Air Force has since acknowledged an overrun of \$1.4 billion but argues that increases on the parts should not be counted.

On Nov. 25, Fitzgerald was notified that he had been given Civil Service tenure through a "computer error." The stripping of tenure cleared the path for his ultimate dismissal.

Last January, the then Air Force Secretary, Harold Brown, received a memo from an aide describing three ways to get rid of Fitzgerald. One was the method used yesterday, wiping out his job.

"Abolishing Your Job"

"Since then, Fitzgerald has been quarantined. Instead of overseeing big programs, he was assigned to such tasks as exploring waste at an Air Force bowling alley in Thailand. His first question in this report was, 'Why was this bowling alley built at all?'"

At 5 p.m. yesterday, his new boss, Air Force Assistant Sec-

retary Spencer J. Schedler, called in Fitzgerald and said:

"We have the cost reduction exercise going, and in order to do our work with a smaller number of people, we are abolishing your job and one other, a secretary's."

Schedler then handed Fitzgerald a letter, formally notifying him that he had 60 days left on the payroll. Fitzgerald was the Air Force's nominee in 1967 for the Defense Department's Distinguished Civilian Service Award.

Fitzgerald, who once testified that at the Pentagon cost reduction is "an antisocial activity," is a native of Birmingham, Ala. After several years in private industry, he headed his own management consulting firm, Performance Technology Corp. Congress has heard others testify that PTC was bankrupted by the Air Force because it was too clever at spotting waste.

Last night, he said he was certain that his testimony "set in motion a chain of events" that culminated in his dismissal. He added that he hopes to continue working at his specialty, cost reduction in defense.