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Fitzgerald Asserts Air Force Isolated Him After Testimony

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By ANTHONY RIPLEY APR 5 1973

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WASHINGTON, April 4 — A. Ernest Fitzgerald told a Civil Service Commission examiner today that he was ostracized and isolated socially and professionally after he testified before Congress in 1968 on the large cost overruns on the C-5A military transport plane.

Mr. Fitzgerald, an Air Force management analyst, appeared Nov. 13, 1968, before the Subcommittee on priorities and Economy in Government of the Joint Economic Committee. Senator William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin, was the committee chairman.

Mr. Fitzgerald said that he had had the approval of his superiors to testify as a backup witness in 1968 but had been told to "stay away from the C-5A in your testimony" and not to prepare a formal statement.

He said that he had told Senator Proxmire about the projected \$2-billion cost overrun on the planes, that neither he nor his superior agreed with optimistic Air Force statements on the project's health and that the ballooning costs were being "assiduously concealed."

He said that the Air Force had called the project a "miracle of procurement," but that it was "just another in the seemingly endless series of dreary financial disasters."

"The cat was out of the bag at that point," he testified today. "I was descended on by reporters in the room. I knew I was in trouble."

He said that after his return to his office in the Pentagon there had been "a flood of phone calls," and his secretary

asked, "Have you been fired yet?"

He said that a "cooling of relationships" set in immediately that was "more like a deep freeze."

An Air Force major advised him that it would be "embarrassing" if he appeared at Pentagon functions, he said. People he passed in the halls of the Pentagon he said, would "look away."

"I was a social leper there immediately," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Twelve days after he testified, he was told that his Civil Service status had been canceled, he said.

He said that Thomas H. Nielsen, Assistant Air Force Secretary for financial management, had shown him a memorandum that suggested three different ways for him to end his service with the Air Force.

Nothing changed when President Johnson left office, and President Nixon succeeded him.

Mr. Fitzgerald said that he spoke to the new Air Force Secretary, Robert C. Seamans Jr.

"The only thing I got out of it was his statement to me that the staff did not like me," Mr. Fitzgerald said. "I already knew that."

He met with Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird and Mr. Laird's deputy, David Packard.

"He was very frank and open and not at all unfriendly, but he was quite candid in saying I'd have to go somewhere else," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Through it all, he said, no one successfully challenged the correctness of his figures on the C-5A.