

The Government That

By Edward B. Fiske
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EVERY OTHER Tuesday at 6:30 a.m. before concentrating on matters of war and peace, a dozen admirals and generals assemble in the Secretary of the Army's private dining room at the Pentagon for coffee, doughnuts and 90 minutes of Bible study.

At the White House about 20 staff members gathered recently at a prayer breakfast to hear Federal Reserve Chairman Arthur F. Burns speak on the nature of prayer. On Monday mornings five men, including a former high-ranking Nixon assistant meet in a home to foster each other's spiritual growth.

Such sessions are part of a little-known aspect of life around the capitol — a loosely organized network of prayer breakfasts, Bible study seminars and religious cell groups that meet on a weekly basis and draw officials from the highest level of government.

No one knows how many such meetings there are, but they are in the dozens. The sessions are normally closed to outsiders. The level is said to range from sophisticated theological discourses to simplistic celebrations of God and country.

The thrust is Christian, but Jews and others are welcome. The requirements are sincerity and a willingness to respect confidentiality and refrain from exploiting the meetings for political gain.

"Thursday is the best day of the week," said Senator Jennings Ran-



An Army officer spends a few moments in the Meditation Room at the Pentagon—one of several areas set aside for prayer

dolph (Dem-W.Va.), who attends the Senate prayer breakfast. "At the end, when we join our hands in prayer, you can feel the grips tightening. You sense that we are going out strengthened."

Abraham Vereide was a Norwegian immigrant and former circuit-riding evangelist who founded the In-

ternational Christian Leadership, to bring leaders of government and industry together for prayer.

In 1942 he persuaded legislators to organize House and Senate prayer breakfasts, and in 1953 President Eisenhower established the annual National Prayer Breakfast.

Fellowship House, the late Ver-

Prays Together

side's former home, is the site of a Monday morning group that includes Senator Harold Hughes (Dem-Iowa) and Charles W. Colson, a former counselor to President Nixon.

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THE WHITE HOUSE sessions, which were begun in 1971 and usually have about 20 persons, are held in a private dining room from 8 to 9 a.m. on alternate Thursdays. The format is breakfast, a prayer, remarks by a speaker, discussion and a closing prayer.

John Nidecker, Presidential assistant who helps organize the meetings, said the emphasis on lay leadership continues. "Otherwise it becomes a Sunday service on Thursday," he remarked.

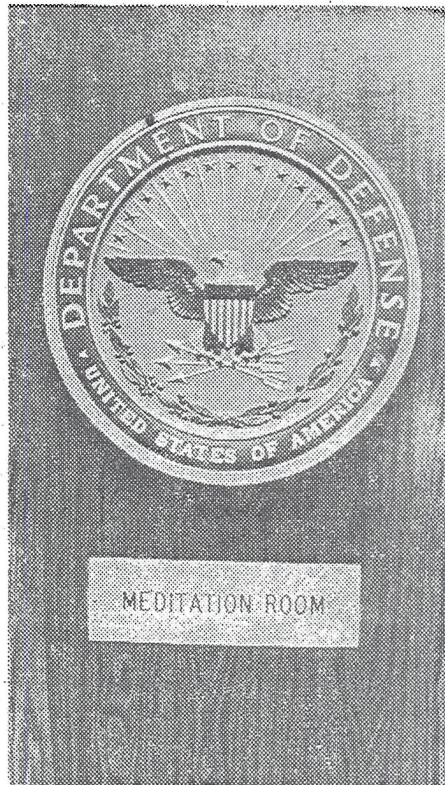
Senate and House prayer breakfast groups meet at the Capitol on Wednesday and Thursday respectively. In the Pentagon, at least a dozen groups meet for breakfast, luncheon or in the chapel before work.

There are governor's breakfasts in 40 states and mayors prayer breakfasts in more than 1000 cities.

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PARTICIPANTS name several reasons for attending the groups, including getting to know their colleagues. "You go beyond their titles or political affiliations and begin to understand them as people," said Roland Elliott, a White House staff member.

Many of the talks are accounts of how members have faced difficulties such as alcoholism or marital rifts.



The sign on the door where leaders pause for inspiration

"You can't help but get encouraged from this kind of testimony," said Representative John T. Myers, (Rep-Ind.), the leader of the House group.

Numerous participants said that the prayer sessions made them more effective in their work and relations with other people. "When I neglect to pray, my work suffers," said Burns, who attends the White House sessions. "The man who prays is a better man."