



# Harry S. Truman Library

U.S. Highway 24 and Delaware Street Independence, Missouri 64050

The Papers of John H. Ohly  
1917(1940)-ca.1984

Attorney in the War Department, 1940-46; Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, 1947-49; official with the Department of State, Mutual Security Agency, Foreign Operations Administration, International Cooperation Administration, and Agency for International Development, 1950-68; independent researcher and historical consultant to the Department of Defense, ca. 1969-84

## Summary Description:

The papers of John H. Ohly document his career as attorney in the War Department specializing in labor relations, as an intimate aid to Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal, as a government official and independent researcher studying and advocating foreign economic and military aid programs, and as an historical consultant to the Department of Defense. The Department of Defense File is particularly important for the study of the Truman administration's defense policies. The John H. Ohly Administrative File subseries in the Department of Defense File includes a record, organized by subject, and describing the issues involved and related actions taken, of practically all the documents that came to Ohly's office. Ohly has called this record "a guide to what went on [during] the first 18 months in the life of the Office of the Secretary of Defense." The rest of the material in the Department of Defense File supplements this record.

## Quantity:

64.4 linear feet (about 128,000 pages)

## Donor:

Elizabeth Ohly

## Access:

Open, with the exception that some documents are temporarily restricted in accordance with the provisions of Elizabeth Ohly's deed of gift and of the requirements of the executive order governing the administration of classified information.

Copyright:

Elizabeth Ohly donated her copyright interest in any unpublished writings, including her husband's, in this collection or any other collection in the possession of the United States Government to the people of the United States. In addition, documents prepared by United States Government employees in the course of their official duties are also in the public domain. Copyright interest in documents that do not fall in the above two categories is presumed to remain with the writers of the documents.

Processed By:

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and Anita M. Smith (1992)

## Biographical Note

- 1911 Born, Brooklyn, New York
- 1933 A.B., Williams College
- 1936 LL.B., Harvard Law School
- 1936-37 Harvard University School of Law Moot Court Assistant
- 1937-40 Practiced law with Breed, Abbott and Morgan, New York City
- 1940-46 Attorney in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War, and later the Under Secretary of War, specializing in labor relations, manpower and related matters
- 1946, June-  
Dec. Special Assistant to the Secretary of War
- 1947, Jan.-  
Sept. Executive Secretary, President's Advisory Commission on Universal Training
- 1947, Sept.-  
1949, Oct. Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense
- 1949-50, Deputy Director and Acting Director, Mutual Defense Assistance Program,  
Department of State
- 1951 Assistant Director, Office of International Security Affairs,  
Department of State
- 1951-52 Special Assistant for Mutual Security Affairs, Department of State
- 1952-53 Assistant Director for Program, Office of Director, Mutual Security Agency
- 1953- Deputy to the Director for Program and Coordination, Mutual Security  
Agency
- 1953-55 Deputy Director for Program and Planning, Foreign Operations Administration
- 1955-59 Deputy Director for Program and Planning, International Cooperation  
Administration
- 1959 Consultant, President's Committee to Study the United States Military  
Assistance Program

1959-68

Official with the International Cooperation Administration and Agency  
for International Development

ca.1968-75

Independent researcher, prepared a report entitled "A Proposal for an Attack  
on the Problem of Public Support"

1979-84

Part-time consultant in the historian's office of the Department of Defense

1990, Sept. 9

Died, North Adams, Massachusetts

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers of John H. Ohly document his entire career in government, which began in 1940 with his accepting a position in the War Department and included later assignments in the Department of Defense and in several agencies having responsibility for foreign economic and military assistance. The papers also document Ohly's work after 1968 as an independent researcher and as an historical consultant to the Department of Defense. The collection throughout reflects the considerable care that Ohly took to accumulate in his files everything that he could that related to his responsibilities. It also reflects the great attention that he gave his papers toward the end of his life. The arrangement scheme described in this finding aid is based on that which Ohly created prior to sending his papers to the Truman Library in 1990. The inventory that Ohly prepared for his papers is filed in the first folder of the John H. Ohly Administrative File subseries of the Department of Defense File.

The collection has six series: The Chronological File, the War Department File, the Department of Defense File, the Foreign Aid File, the Ford Foundation Project File, and the Printed Materials File.

The Chronological File documents Ohly's work in the War Department and with government agencies concerned with foreign aid. His work as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal is not covered in this series; the Department of Defense series includes a separate Chronological File subseries. Although the series is composed entirely of carbon copies, many of the documents are not duplicated elsewhere in Ohly's papers.

The War Department File documents primarily Ohly's work from September 1940 to June 1946 as an attorney in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War, and later the Under Secretary of War, specializing in labor relations and manpower issues, and, during the last ten months of this period,

organizing his unit's files and writing histories of its operations, and especially a history of the plant seizure program during World War II. There does not appear to be any material in this series relating to his work from June through December 1946 as a special assistant to the Secretary of War--despite Ohly's identification of about twenty files relating to this period in Attachment D to his inventory. There is a small amount of material in the series that documents Ohly's assignment from January to September 1947 as executive secretary of the President's Advisory Commission on Universal Training. The series contains information about such subjects as anti-labor attitudes, the condition of work for government employees, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, labor legislation, the labor supply, plant protection, plant seizure, labor statutes, and the War Department's labor policy. About a third of the material in the series concerns plant protection and plant seizures.

The Department of Defense File is probably the most important series in the collection for the study of the Truman presidency. Ohly was, with his fellow Special Assistants Marx Leva and Wilfred J. McNejl, the core of the small staff allotted to the Secretary of Defense prior to the passage of the 1949 amendments to the National Security Act. This series comprises a significant part of the documentation of the formative period of the Department of Defense. It is divided into four subseries: a John H. Ohly Administrative File, a Chronological File, a Subject File, and an Historical File.

The John H. Ohly Administrative File, which combines different types of materials that Ohly accumulated to help him to carry out his responsibilities in the most effective way, includes what he called his "Special Control Files" and described as "unquestionably the most important historical material in my files." Most, though not quite all, of the material in this subseries relates to Ohly's

tenure in the National Military Establishment and the Department of Defense. The "Issues Books," which are described below, contain material that documents a much longer period in Ohly's career.

Perhaps what Ohly called his "Basic Index," comprising about 700 pages, is the most remarkable group of documents in this series. Ohly describes the "Basic Index" in this way: "My responsibilities in the [office of Secretary of Defense James V.] Forrestal office were such that virtually all important papers except those pertaining to relations with Congress, the budget, legal matters, and office administration (and often many of these too) flowed across my desk coming in and frequently going out. With the help of two secretaries, I maintained a record, elaborately organized by subject, of their receipt, the nature of the matter, and resulting actions taken, often with references to phone calls related thereto.... This record is [more or less] comprehensive and...might serve as a guide to what went on [during] the first 18 months in the life of the Office of the Secretary of Defense." The documents in the "Basic Index" are arranged alphabetically under subject headings. An unclassified version of the list of subject headings according to which Ohly filed this material is included as Appendix A to this finding aid.

Another important group of documents in this subseries is what Ohly called his "Issues Books," comprising about 800 pages. He describes the files as follows: "In most jobs that I have held, I recurrently made lists of issues, questions, and tasks that needed to be addressed or performed--sometimes in terms of my own duties or desires, sometimes in terms of matters that needed to be addressed by some other agency or individual...and sometimes to serve as the agenda for a meeting. Often memos or other material prepared by someone else were incorporated with my own. These lists tell a relatively chronological story of what I was engaged in doing during the period of my working life and...of the life of the organization of which I was a member." Ohly apparently

carried these issues books with him throughout most of his career, with the result that they cover a long period of time, beginning in 1939 when he was a lawyer in New York, and extending to his retirement from government service in 1968. One of the issues books includes information about the main responsibilities that Ohly had when he served as special assistant to the Secretary of War from June to December, 1946, a position and period that are otherwise poorly documented in the collection.

The John H. Ohly Administrative File contains three other types of material. The "JHO People Book No. 5," also called "The Forrestal Notebook," lists and gives information about and assessments of the qualifications of people whom Secretary of Defense Forrestal was considering recruiting into important defense and foreign policy related positions. According to Ohly, Forrestal kept this "People Book" on his desk and used it extensively. "It was my job," Ohly says, "to keep custody of it and to maintain it, as well as to follow through on the addition of names to it and, in some cases, making contact with people on the list to determine whether they might be interested in an assignment, to arrange for interviews with Forrestal or phone calls from him, and to familiarize them with positions for which they might be sought or to orient them for ones they had accepted." Of the remaining "People Books," No. 3 is in the Subject File subseries of the Foreign Aid File, but Nos. 1, 2 and 4 cannot be accounted for. Ohly's description of the five "People Books" is included as Appendix B to this finding aid.

The remaining two types of material in the John H. Ohly Administrative File are appointment books listing and briefly indicating the purport of Ohly's meetings and telephone calls from October 1947 through November 1949; and a "workbook" which contains memoranda and notes filed under approximately twenty subject headings, from "airplanes" to "war reserve."

The second subseries in the Department of Defense File is the Chronological File, which contains carbon copies of correspondence and memoranda prepared in Ohly's office. This material includes internal Defense Department memoranda, among them detailed "Memoranda for the Files" that Ohly frequently prepared to record the content of meetings and telephone and other conversations. The range of topics documented in this subseries seems to encompass most of the issues that came before the Defense Department during Ohly's tenure there.

The third subseries is the Subject File. Much of the material in this subseries is filed under the names of agencies and organizations within or with a close working relationship with the Department of Defense. The subseries includes files, for example, on the Central Intelligence Agency, the Committee of the Four Secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Munitions Board, the National Security Council, the National Security Resources Board, the Research and Development Board, and the War Council. Files named for topics include those for civil defense, internal security, unconventional warfare, the unification of the Armed Forces, and universal military training. Additional information has been added to the folder titles, in brackets, by the archives staff in several instances. The subseries includes a small amount of material carried forward by Ohly into his Department of Defense files from his War Department files. Most of it is dated 1946, but a few items date from 1939 and 1940. This material is in the folders entitled "Military Justice," "Organizations," and "Release of Information." The "Organizations" folder--and another folder, entitled "Budget Activities"--contains comments by Ohly on Steven Rearden's History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, The Formative Years, 1947-50 (Washington, D.C., 1984).

The last subseries is the Historical File, which documents Ohly's participation in a conference about the United States military establishment, held at the George C. Marshall Research Foundation

in 1977, and includes some of Ohly's lengthy comments in review of the two volumes of the History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Steven L. Rearden's The Formative Years, 1947-1950 (Washington, D.C., 1984), and Doris M. Condit's The Test of War, 1950-53 (Washington, D.C., 1988). All of Ohly's comments on Condit's book appear to be present in this series; most of his comments on Rearden's book, as mentioned above, are in the Subject File subseries--in the folders entitled "Budget Activities" and "Organizations." Ohly's review of Rearden's and Condit's books was undertaken as part of his responsibilities as part-time consultant in the historian's office of the Department of Defense from 1979 to 1984.

The large Foreign Aid File documents Ohly's long tenure, from 1949 to 1968, with government agencies responsible for developing and administering the United States' foreign aid program. During the Truman administration Ohly served, beginning in November 1949 and for various periods and sometimes with overlapping tenures, as Deputy Director and Acting Director of the State Department's Mutual Defense Assistance Program, as Assistant Director of the State Department's Office of International Security Affairs, as Special Assistant of the State Department's Office of Mutual Security Affairs, and as Assistant Director of Programs in the office of the Director of the Mutual Security Agency. In an oral history interview conducted in 1971, Ohly said that during this period of his service, he "worked very closely with the White House and Budget Bureau personnel in the drafting of Presidential messages relating to foreign aid, in the preparation of executive orders, in obtaining Presidential findings required under foreign aid laws, and in presenting, and obtaining final decisions on, foreign aid budgets and legislation.... While I never worked directly with the President himself, I did work extensively with Sidney Souers, Clark Clifford, Dave Bell, other members of the White House staff, and the Director of the Budget Bureau...."

The Foreign Aid File is divided into three subseries: a Subject File, a Program Planning and Development File, and a Congressional File. The Subject File, by far the largest subseries, comprises what Ohly called his "functional files," organized "for day-to-day use by Ohly during the years 1949 to 1967." This subseries includes studies of and reports on the foreign aid program, the administration of the Agency for International Development, and Congressional perceptions of the foreign aid programs; background information on the sources and recipients of foreign aid and on the military and non-military forms that foreign aid can take; documentation of the foreign aid programs in individual countries and regions of the world; a selection of speeches by Ohly and by several Presidents on the foreign aid program; and information about the foreign aid program's complicated organizational structure and the problem of selecting and training qualified personnel to administer the aid program. The Subject File also includes a large amount of material, about 10,000 pages in volume, relating to Ohly's work as Acting Director of the Technical Assistance Study Group, a temporary group that was established in the fall of 1959 within the International Cooperation Administration as a result of a decision made by the Director of the ICA and the Under Secretary of State that the government should undertake a major study of the subject of technical assistance. A permanent director for the group was never found and its study was never completed. It was disbanded in the summer of 1963. Ohly's files relating to the Technical Assistance Study Group include information on the initiation and progress of the group's study of the government's technical assistance programs, its methods of work and interviewing procedures, and the organization of its research material. These files also include the group's "digests" of information relating to technical assistance programs and transcripts of their interviews with the participants in these programs.

The second subseries in the Foreign Aid File is the Program Planning and Development File, which Ohly described as follows: "These files contain...papers having to do with the initial development and the processing through the Executive Branch (including in particular the Bureau of the Budget) of annual requests to Congress for authorizing and appropriations legislation relating to foreign aid and the adaptation and adjustments made in the initial submissions in the light of the actions taken by Congress on the initial Executive Branch request." The subseries has files on the Mutual Defense Assistance Program for fiscal years 1950 through 1961.

The third subseries in the Foreign Aid File is the Congressional File, which Ohly described in this way: "These files have to do with two major matters, (1) the annual Congressional authorization and appropriations processes of the foreign aid programs presented by the executive branch for fiscal [years] 1951 through 1959, and (2) the general problem of how to obtain adequate Congressional support for the foreign aid program in Congress...." This subseries includes Ohly's study of the problem of achieving Congressional support for the President's foreign aid program, undertaken in the mid 1960s at the request of the director of the Agency for International Development.

The next series, the Ford Foundation Project File, contains a copy of a report that Ohly prepared over a period of about six years after his active government employment had ended. He undertook work on this report, which he regarded as a continuation of his investigation for the Agency for International Development of the problem of how to sustain a high level of Congressional support for a foreign aid program, independently. His focus in this study was on the abstract issue of how a society could create and sustain a level of public support for any important public policy issue sufficient to allow it effectively to deal with that issue. Ohly seems to have believed that several gravely serious problems would have to be confronted in the next fifty years. He felt that the work of

public education had to be undertaken by some institution outside of government. When he completed the report in 1975, he took it to the Ford Foundation, whose leadership he admired and whose endowment he felt was large enough to enable it to undertake the kind of educational effort he envisioned. To the best of Ohly's knowledge at the time he died in 1990, his report had not had any significant influence or produced action of any consequence. The series contains a complete copy of the report and a partial draft.

The collection's last series is the Printed Materials File, which contains books, articles, reports and other printed materials from Ohly's personal library that are annotated by him. Most items are only very slightly annotated; heavily annotated items are identified as such on the folder title list. Printed materials from his personal library that do not contain any annotations were transferred to the Library's printed materials collection. The printed materials are divided into five subseries, as follows: Atomic Energy, Universal Military Training, Unification of the Armed Forces, Military Assistance, and Economic Assistance.

The Philleo Nash Papers and the David H. Stowe Papers contain information relating to labor relations issues in the War Department during the time Ohly served there. Material relating to the Defense Department during Ohly's tenure is in the President's Secretary's Files, the Confidential File, the Official File (OF 1285), the Ralph N. Stohl Papers, the Clark M. Clifford Papers, and the George M. Elsey Papers. Material relating to the United States' foreign aid programs is included in the records of the President's Committee on Foreign Aid, the Benjamin H. Hardy Papers, the George M. Elsey Papers, the Henry G. Bennett Papers, the Stanley Andrew Papers, and the Milton Katz Papers. The Oral History Collection includes an interview conducted with Ohly on November 30, 1971.

Description of Series

Container Nos.

Series

1-6

Chronological File, 1943-46, 1949-58, 1963, 1968

Carbon copies of correspondence and memoranda together with a small number of mimeographed copies and original documents relating to Ohly's work in the War Department and with agencies responsible for foreign aid programs. The files from 1943 to 1946 include memoranda for the record that Ohly prepared to record the content of meetings and conversations and to describe the subsequent actions taken. This series does not document Ohly's work in the Department of Defense from 1947 to 1949. A separate Chronological File subseries in the Department of Defense File documents this period. Arranged in chronological order.

7-61

War Department File, 1917(1940)-(1946)1952

Correspondence, memoranda, reports, legal documents, press releases and newspaper clippings relating primarily to Ohly's work as an attorney in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War, and later the Under Secretary of War, specializing in labor relations, manpower and related issues. About a third of the material in the series concerns plant protection and plant seizure. A small amount of material relates to Ohly's assignment as executive secretary of the President's Advisory Commission on Universal Training. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

62-85

Department of Defense File, 1939(1947)-(1949)ca. 1984, consisting of four subseries as follows:

62-68

John H. Ohly Administrative File, 1939 (1947)-(1949)1968: Correspondence, memoranda, personnel lists, appointment books, handwritten notes, and printed material constituting what Ohly called his "Special Control Files" and documenting primarily his work as Special Assistant to Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal. Ohly considered the remarkable compilations of information that he called his "Basic Index" and "Issues Books" to be the most important historical material in his collection. An

unclassified version of the list of subject headings according to which Ohly filed the material in the Basic Index included as Appendix A to this finding aid. The issues books document Ohly's career from 1939, when he was a lawyer working in New York, until 1968, when he retired from active federal service. Ohly's inventory to his files has been placed at the beginning of this subseries. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

69-75

Chronological File, 1947-49: Carbon copies of correspondence and memoranda prepared in Ohly's office and apparently relating to all of the duties of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense. The subseries includes "Memoranda for the Files" that Ohly prepared to record the content of meetings and telephone and other conversations. Filed chronologically.

76-84

Subject File, 1939(1947)-(1949)ca. 1984: Correspondence, memoranda, reports, agenda, agency directives, minutes of meetings, handwritten notes, organizational charts, speeches, Congressional publications and newspaper clippings relating to Ohly's Defense Department responsibilities. Arranged alphabetically by subject. Information about the contents of many of the folders has been added, in brackets, to the folder-title listings.

85

Historical File, 1947-ca. 1984: Correspondence, notes, a draft of a professional paper and a newspaper clipping relating to Ohly's participation in a conference about the United States military establishment, held at the George C. Marshall Research Foundation in 1977; and chapter drafts of Steven L. Rearden's and Doris M. Condit's volumes in the History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, together with Ohly's lengthy commentary on portions of Condit's book, and a small part of his commentary on portions of Rearden's book. The rest of his commentary on Rearden's book is in the Subject File subseries of the Department of Defense File, in the folders entitled "Budget Activities" and "Organizations." Arranged in chronological order.