

Dudley Crawford Sharp

December 11, 1959–January 20, 1961



Portrait by Lloyd Bowers Embrey



DUDLEY CRAWFORD SHARP was born in Houston, Texas, on March 16, 1905. He attended public and private schools in Houston and completed his pre-college schooling at the Gilman Country School in Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated from Princeton University with a bachelor of science degree in 1927. In January 1929 he married Tina Cleveland, and they had two children.

Immediately following graduation from Princeton, Sharp joined the Mission Manufacturing Company of Houston as its vice president. The firm, which had been started by his oldest brother, specialized in the manufacture of petroleum industry equipment. Sharp founded the Texas Fund Inc., an investment firm; in 1935 he became the company executive vice president and in 1946 its president. During World War II, Sharp served in the U.S. Navy, on sea duty in various capacities as executive officer and commanding officer of antisubmarine warfare vessels. He later served in the Office of Procurement and Materiel with the U.S. Navy in Washington, D.C.

At the end of the war, Sharp returned to Mission Manufacturing as president and chairman of the board. In 1955 President Dwight D. Eisenhower recalled him to Washington to become assistant Air Force secretary for materiel. Although hesitant to leave his business, he accepted the opportunity to serve in government on the condition that he retain his right to criticize other government officials. As assistant secretary he suggested a plan that would have had business leaders taking turns in government assignments so that no one would have to make too great a personal sacrifice in leaving his own business. He was the Air Force representative on the Air Coordinating Committee; the Mutual Defense Assistance Management Council and the Research and Development Policy Council in the Office of the Secretary of Defense; and the Maintenance Facilities Board in the Office of Defense Mobilization. He stayed for three-and-one-half years, resigning in 1959 when labor troubles erupted at his Houston company. He told his government associates not to hesitate to recall him should he be needed.

In August 1959 Sharp returned to the Pentagon to succeed Malcolm A. McIntyre, who was retiring as undersecretary of the Air Force. In December of that year, when Secretary of the Air Force James H. Douglas, Jr., rose to become deputy defense secretary, Sharp assumed

the top Air Force post. His thirteen-month stint as Air Force leader at the end of the Eisenhower administration was far too short to establish precedents for future air secretaries. Despite his lame-duck status he continued the policies of Secretary Douglas and, with his predecessor, advocated that contracts for civil cargo airlift proceed in peacetime to ensure overseas logistical support. While at the Pentagon, Sharp gained a reputation for his work in developing efficient procurement and supply techniques. In the continuing defense debate, he supported President Eisenhower against those who wanted to increase government spending on missiles and bombers.

In January 1960 he returned to Mission Manufacturing, where he remained until he sold the company to TRW in 1976. After his retirement he served as director of the Lighthouse for the Blind, chairman of the local Republican Party, and a board member of the Museum of Natural History and the M. D. Anderson Cancer Hospital. He was also president of the Houston Chamber of Commerce and helped raise money for the Alley Theater, a professional repertory group in that city. The sixth secretary of the Air Force died of cancer on May 17, 1987, in Houston.