3 Builders Say No Pressure Used for B-36

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 17 (AP)—Three airplane manufacturers testified before a House subcommittee Wednesday that there was no political pressure involved in the awarding of a contract to Consolidated-Vultee to build the B-36 super bomber.

They were John K. Northrop, president of Northrop Aircraft, Inc., Oliver P. Echols, chairman of the board at Northrop, and William Allen, secretary-president of Boeing Aircraft.

The House armed forces subcommittee, headed by Rep. John F. Emanuel of South Carolina, is investigating reports that political favoritism, may have led to Consolidated Vultee’s B-36 as a major Air Force weapon.

The Air Force originally awarded a contract to Northrop for 30 B-36 bombers with a single engine flying wing, but later canceled the contract and gave another one to Consolidated Vultee.

Wednesday, however, Northrop told the committee: “I can’t conceive of there being any political influence on the Air Force’s cancellation of Northrop’s contract.”

Echols told the investigators that Floyd Odlum, head of Consolidated, once suggested to him that two firms be merged, with Echols taking over as head of both. Northrop rejected the idea, Echols said, because he wanted to keep its separate identity.

“Normal Procedure,” Echols, longtime chief of the Air Force, said, “said the merger was suggested several years after his retirement as a colonel.”

“I was probably more responsible than anyone else for having the B-36 ordered.”

Echols said he didn’t see how political influence could have been brought to bear in awarding the contract.

The probe was launched in the wake of a Government panel investigating reports about Secretary of Defense Johnson, Symington, and others.

Van Zandt said he “heard that” Symington planned to resign and head an aircraft combine to be organized by Consolidated-Vultee of San Diego, makers of the B-36. Symington emphasized that this was reported to him in a hearing of the subcommittee last Friday.

Echols described how the con-
tract was awarded to Consolidated-Vultee in 1941. He said the need for production of an intercontinental bomber was first raised by Gen. Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, then chief of the Air Force.

"Arnold told me the world situation from the viewpoint of the U.S. armed forces was unsatisfactory," Echols testified. "He wanted my view. whether to build a bomber with a 10,000-mile range which could carry a 10,000-pound bomb load."

Echols said Wright Field, Ohio, engineers were asked to study the question and make recommendations. He said the Wright Field engineers later presented a design to a conference of top Air Force officers.

The witness said he recalled that Boeing, Douglas, Martin, Northrop and Consolidated-Vultee were contacted on the idea of bidding for the contract for the new bomber.

Echols said the contract was awarded to Consolidated-Vultee as a result of the recommendation of an engineering committee at Wright Field which considered the Consolidated design the best. He said the award was approved by an Air Force board of 15 top officers.

He said approval by the 15 officers "was not usual procedure for awarding a contract." "This was different because the top staff officers were so interested in the project."

"We got what we wanted," said Echols. "We got a 10,000-mile bomber that could carry a 10,000-mile bomb load."

Echols said that in 1945 he was transferred from the Air Force to the military government staff in Berlin and after that had no further connection with the Air Force.