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Vermont's First Public Safety Commissioner

Edson hoped that his wartime reputation, coupled with the successful creation of the state police, would cement his credentials in his home state.

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Vermont first considered the idea of a state police force in the mid-1930s, after a daring noontime bank robbery in Manchester Center. The bandits easily escaped because the sheriff was on vacation in Canada and his deputy had gone fishing. A special committee set up by the governor came out in favor of a statewide crime-fighting organization in 1937, but legislators vetoed the idea. In December 1946 a coed disappeared from Bennington College. The unsuccessful investigations of city police and county sheriffs provided political fuel for a proposal by newly elected governor Ernest Gibson to establish a state police agency that would not be hampered by jurisdictional boundaries. He got the law he wanted in April 1947. It consolidated a number of small, specialized enforcement bodies: inspectors from the Department of Motor Vehicles, the fire marshal's staff from the Department of Banking and Insurance, and criminal investigators from the Public Welfare Department. The law doubled their numbers with new recruits and gave them broad powers to enforce state statutes related to crime and safety.¹

Now all the governor needed was someone to head the new force. He focused his attention on one of Vermont's leading sons, Brigadier Gen-



General Edson, president of the foundation that built the Marine Corps Memorial, speaks at the 1954 ground-breaking ceremony.

eral Merritt A. Edson. Edson had grown up in Chester, served in the 1916 Mexican border campaign with the Vermont National Guard, and left the University of Vermont after his sophomore year to join the Marines during World War I. Thirty years later, he had acquired the nickname “Red Mike”—for the beard he wore while campaigning against Sandino in Nicaragua—and become a premier hero of the Corps. His many awards for valor included a Medal of Honor won in desperate fighting on the island of Guadalcanal. (That made Edson the only Vermonter to win the nation’s highest decoration during World War II.) He had also established a reputation as an innovator and a top-notch staff officer.

But by mid-1947 Edson’s once promising military career was at an end. Despite orders to remain silent, he had publicly campaigned against President Harry Truman’s plan to unify the armed forces because he sincerely believed that it would give the military too much power in a democratic society. After a strident speech to University of Vermont alumni in Burlington and appearances before committees of the House and Senate in Washington, Edson resigned in protest. His bold actions played a major role in motivating Congress to reshape the legislation that would eventually become the National Security Act of 1947. The *Burlington Daily News* praised him for his moral courage:

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It may be true that General Edson might have been wiser had he waited until he is out of uniform on July 1 before making his speech. But Edson doesn't play ball that way either. He speaks his mind; he tells the truth without fear of consequences. God bless him for this forthrightness. It will stand him in good stead here in Vermont, where the truth still keeps men free.²

Gibson was about the same age as Edson, and the two had been acquainted since their youth, probably through Paul Ballou (the governor's cousin and Edson's childhood friend). The governor was a graduate of the military academy at Norwich and had followed in the footsteps of his father, a prominent lawyer and politician in Vermont. When Ernest Gibson Sr. died in 1940, Ernest Gibson Jr. filled his vacant seat in the U.S. Senate until he went into the army the following year. He served in the South Pacific, where he was wounded in combat in the Solomons. A progressive Republican, he won election to the governorship in 1946 on a platform to reform state government. Ballou described him as a man who "does not hesitate to say what he thinks." It was not surprising, then, that Gibson turned to a well-known military leader with a similar outlook to head one of the major initiatives of his young administration.³

One more factor made Edson the ideal candidate for the job. The famous marine, fresh from the political battlefields of Washington, was interested in eventually running for elective office; Gibson and Edson discussed the possibility of using the public safety position as a springboard into politics. The governor thought that Vermont's U.S. senators were strongly entrenched and reasonably effective, but he believed that the state's lone representative, Charles Plumley, was "ripe to be plucked at any time." Edson hoped that his wartime reputation, coupled with the successful creation of the state police, would cement his credentials in his home state. His goal of unseating Vermont's conservative Republican representative thus became an added bonus for the progressive governor who appointed him commissioner.⁴

On July 1, 1947, there was an "impressive and historic ceremony" to inaugurate the Department of Public Safety. As the noontime sun blazed down on the gold dome of the state capitol, Governor Gibson swore in Edson on the front steps of the building. The new commissioner then led the seventy men and women of his infant force in the oath of office. In his brief speech Edson praised Vermont, for "nowhere else are the principles of constitutional government more firmly entrenched." And he stated that he expected loyalty to the department from each of its members: "That does not mean that I want you to be 'yes' men, for no man can be truly loyal to his superior unless he expresses his honest opinion when asked for it." Those words had real meaning for a man still fighting the closing battles of the antiunification campaign.⁵

While Edson kept one eye on Washington in summer 1947, his hands were full in Montpelier. He found it no easy task to create an entirely new organization, particularly one born to high expectations. His service background was useful in some respects. He established policy by issuing general orders in military format and created efficiency rating forms that looked suspiciously like Marine Corps fitness reports. He also headed the board that designed uniforms, which were a cross between those worn by U.S. Marines and their British counterparts.

But the former general did not rely solely on his military experience. Prior to leaving Washington, he had conferred with J. Edgar Hoover and several experts in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. After arriving in Vermont, Edson traveled to surrounding states to talk with the heads of state police forces and to observe those agencies in action. He sent some of his own troopers to training programs in other states and to the Harvard Legal-Medical School to learn about forensics. He moved quickly to tie Vermont into a regional police teletype system that already included every New England and Mid-Atlantic state except his own.

In other areas he demonstrated an astute awareness of local politics, probably a result of his willingness to accept advice from the governor and from subordinates more familiar with the terrain. His very first order kept his troopers out of matters traditionally handled by local law enforcement agencies, unless those bodies specifically requested help. Although the statute did not require it, that policy wisely defused potential turf battles with the politically powerful sheriffs. A tougher problem was deciding what to do about district offices. The state police inherited eleven offices from the Department of Motor Vehicles, but keeping each open twenty-four hours a day would tie thirty-three of Edson's fifty-four uniformed patrol officers to their desks. Many localities without offices wanted new ones opened; requests came from a number of influential citizens, including old friend Paul Ballou on behalf of Chester. The commissioner hoped to move in the opposite direction and close offices to save money and labor. In turning down Ballou, Edson told him that Pennsylvania, with a force of 1,600 state police, had just twelve districts.⁶

Edson undertook an extensive public relations program. He spoke at club meetings and other functions around the state, sometimes as many as three in one day, and he initiated a weekly radio broadcast. This helped him sell the state police force—"no wise person wants to give his wholehearted support to an organization about which he knows nothing"—and raise public awareness on issues involving crime and safety. It made him a more familiar face with the voters, too. He invariably stressed that he headed the Department of Public Safety, not just the state police. Thus his stated goal was not simply to arrest lawbreakers but to deter viola-

tions and accidents. To make his force all the more visible, he had patrol cars painted bright green with a broad yellow stripe running along the sides, and he sought to keep his officers and vehicles on the road as much as possible.⁷

A number of problems confronted Edson in his first year as commissioner. Foremost was the lack of suitable headquarters. After considerable searching, he and the governor settled on Redstone, a large brick mansion set in the middle of 8 wooded acres to the north of the state capitol. Public Safety leased the premises for \$1,000 per year but had to spend \$35,000 to renovate the building, which had been unused for three decades. Another state account picked up most of the cost, which otherwise would have crippled the department's \$390,000 annual budget. Various delays kept Edson from occupying his new headquarters until February 1948, so he and his office staff had to operate from widely scattered locations around the city for seven months. Installation of a state-wide radio network proved even more difficult. It took months to pick a contractor and even longer to get approval for frequencies from the Federal Communications Commission. The work of erecting antennas and transmitter buildings on the state's highest peaks took until spring 1948. The final cost of the radio system exceeded the \$60,000 contract price by \$40,000.

Edson also discovered that he did not have enough people to meet all the duties imposed upon his force by the enabling legislation. Uniformed officers had to patrol the highways; investigate crimes, fires, and accidents; conduct safety training in the schools; enforce fish and wildlife regulations; and maintain extensive criminal identification records. (More unusual tasks surfaced on occasion, such as a nighttime search of rugged Mount Mansfield for a young couple reported to be lost there.) On average, each uniformed trooper worked ninety hours per week and logged 23,000 miles on the road during the first year. As a result, Edson had to ask for a 50 percent increase in staff.⁸

The cost of the state police force had been a significant point of debate in the legislature at the time of the law's passage. The department's budget overruns thus became a political football in the 1948 election campaign. Lieutenant Governor Lee Emerson, a candidate for governor in the Republican primary, pressed hard on the point to demonstrate his fiscal conservatism. Simple things like the cost of two flagpoles in front of Redstone became big news. The result was animosity between Edson and Emerson.⁹

Although Gibson eventually won another term, the debate over spending created some doubt in the public's mind about Edson's stewardship of the state police. At first Vermonters had welcomed the retired general's

no-nonsense attitude toward his duty. He made headlines when he used his personal car to chase down and capture a youthful speeder who flashed by him on the highway. Later, his unbending nature created some discontent. When members of a local chapter of the American Legion asked him to speak, for example, they found they had invited trouble. Their hall housed several slot machines; although the state had outlawed such gambling devices, many fraternal organizations used them as fundraisers anyway. Two days after his appearance at the American Legion, Edson ordered a sweep of the lodges of veterans' groups. Troopers seized machines and issued citations at several locations. Edson personally led the raid on the American Legion hall while it was crowded with state convention delegates, but the contraband material had mysteriously disappeared from the building.

This time the editorial writers were not all supportive. One newspaper called his action a "slap-happy raid." The legionnaires were outraged that he had abused their hospitality, and they publicly voiced their dissatisfaction. Edson retorted that it was they who should have apologized to him for putting him in an awkward position in the first place—just a few months earlier he had clearly stated his intention to enforce the anti-gambling statutes. He also publicized his opinion that groups should seek to change the law rather than flout it if they did not agree with it: "A poor law is worse than none and the law of Prohibition is exemplary of that. The result is the general breakdown of the moral fiber of the people." The *Burlington Free Press* backed the commissioner, noting that "he doesn't make the law—he is sworn to enforce it; and he isn't the kind that tries to avoid a duty. One has only to read his war record to know that." But the politically potent private clubs were not mollified.¹⁰

There were some legitimate complaints about state police failures, most resulting from the shortage of manpower. On one occasion an officer did not respond in timely fashion to a call about a man who had been beaten and robbed on a Friday morning. That same day a neighbor telephoned the Montpelier headquarters to register her displeasure. Edson himself returned her call thirty minutes later and immediately dispatched his deputy commissioner to investigate. When reporters questioned a surprised governor about the incident on Monday, he made a public demand for an inquiry. The next day the newspapers noted that on Saturday there had been a complete report of the matter on Edson's desk that would have been available to Gibson had he requested it. The governor was no doubt embarrassed at having moved too publicly and hastily to shift the spotlight to the commissioner, and Edson probably regretted not having informed his superior before the press got hold of the story. This did not

create a rift between the two men, but it was another public setback for both of them.¹¹

Despite the criticism leveled from several quarters, Edson kept up his program to win over the state. In addition to making public appearances and radio broadcasts, he responded personally to specific complaints, accepted blame where justified, and offered to meet with people "to answer in person such criticism and such questions as they may care to raise." At the end of one newspaper interview, he extended an invitation for anyone to visit any of his installations at any time: "We're open twenty-four hours a day. That's seven days a week." Guided tours to inaugurate the first day at Redstone drew 850 curious citizens. At the same time, years of experience in the Marine Corps had left Edson wary of the power of the press. His school for new troopers included a course on how to deal with reporters.¹²

The demands of the job kept Edson extremely busy during this first year. When he was not off visiting a distant part of the state, he was in his office till late at night. He remarked to his wife, Ethel, "I do not know where I ever got the idea that I would have more leisure here than in Washington."¹³

Throughout his time in Vermont, Edson continued to lobby against subsequent drives by the Truman administration to complete its scheme to unify the armed forces. Edson's opposition to defense unification received a boost in December 1947. Hanson Baldwin, the respected military analyst of the *New York Times*, published an article in *Harper's* magazine titled "The Military Moves In." Baldwin noted with alarm the increasing "militarization of our government and the American state of mind." Too many senior officers were assuming positions of authority in the civilian realm, Secretary of State George Marshall being a prime example, and the 1947 legislation had "potentially dangerous provisions." Baldwin did not agree with all of Edson's criticisms of unification, though he did quote him and recalled that the general had retired in protest. The article contained numerous points obviously culled from material Edson had fed the reporter earlier in the year. A national broadcast picked up on the theme the next day and prominently mentioned the retired general. Other commentators gave the topic wider play in the days that followed, and one marine suggested it would be a good time for Edson to arrange a national interview "as the man who started all this."¹⁴

Edson worked behind the scenes through the press and Vermont's senators to push his philosophical opposition to military encroachment into civilian affairs, but he openly spoke out against Truman's proposal for universal military training. Edson thought the answer to readiness was stronger reserve and active forces, not a misguided program that put

generals in charge of the civilian population. He arranged to be called as a witness before the national defense subcommittee of Herbert Hoover's Commission on Reorganization of the Executive Departments, and then incessantly lobbied individual members while they worked on their report. One of them later wrote Edson that "none of our committee—certainly none of the advisors or consultants—has shown more interest in this tremendously important business than yourself."¹⁵

Edson was becoming a powerful voice because of his rising position in a number of organizations. The National Rifle Association elected him vice president in 1948 and president the following year. Edson's conversations with leaders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars resulted in his appointment to their national security committee, which developed that influential organization's stand on defense issues. He also worked vigorously to maintain the strong ties of allegiance built up among a generation of men who had fought in World War II, playing a prominent behind-the-scenes role in the Marine Corps League, serving as president of the 1st Marine Division Association, and acting as honorary president of the 1st Raider Battalion veterans' group (formally named the Edson's Raiders Association in his honor).

Although the basis of these latter organizations was purely fraternal, they provided a vital source of political support. During the 1948 primary election, Edson threw his backing to New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, who went on to win the Republican nomination for president. For a time Edson hoped Dewey would name him military chief of staff, an advisory role Admiral William D. Leahy had held under Franklin Roosevelt and Truman. That hope dissolved when Truman snatched an unexpected victory at the polls in November, but Edson still found a willing ear whenever he spoke to senators and representatives.¹⁶

Edson's importance in the antiunification offensive stemmed in large measure from the reluctance of active-duty officers to risk their careers by openly defying the administration. In April 1949 the president had issued Consolidation Directive Number 1, which contained an order designed to stifle military dissent. It applied not only to those on active duty but also to reservists, retirees, and civilian defense employees. It required prior review, "for security, policy, and propriety," of any public utterance on defense matters. Edson saw the sweeping nature of the directive as proof that the public had cause for alarm. In one speech he explained that coupling that policy with passage of universal military training would eventually give the defense establishment the right to censor the speech of the entire adult male population of the country.¹⁷

In 1949 *Collier's* published Edson's article "Power-Hungry Men in Uniform," which reiterated his well-developed arguments about the political

dangers of further centralization of military power. It met with praise from some quarters, and Edson decided that he should carry his own standard in the journalistic arena instead of merely feeding information to others. He hoped that his reservoir of fame from his wartime exploits would enable him to become a regular contributor to a national newspaper or magazine. His interest was heightened by the \$1,000 fee from *Collier's*, the equivalent of two months of his commissioner's salary. In August 1949 Edson attended a writing workshop given by literary notables Robert Frost, Catherine Drinker Bowen, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Fletcher Pratt.¹⁸

An unexpected event disrupted his writing plans. Stomach pains he had been experiencing for some time grew worse, so he checked into Bethesda Hospital in mid-September. After a thorough battery of tests, the doctors finally discovered the cause, a diaphragmatic hernia. The surgery went well, but his recovery was long and difficult. He had a great deal of pain that lasted well beyond the doctors' expectations. A month later surgeons traced his trouble to a pinched nerve where they had broken his ribs to gain access to the chest cavity. The aftereffects of this operation left him without "pep or ambition" for some time. He finally returned to Vermont just before Thanksgiving.¹⁹

During Edson's stay in the hospital, another of his long-standing interests came to the fore. Senator George Aiken of Vermont mentioned at a press conference that he expected the commissioner of public safety to run against him in the 1950 primaries. Edson had no such intention and made that clear to the media while he was in Washington. It was an unlikely rumor because Aiken and Governor Gibson were political allies, and the senator was far and away the most popular figure in the state. Edson was, however, giving serious thought to the only other national race to be decided in his home state in 1950, Vermont's lone seat in the House of Representatives. He had begun discussions on the issue with Senator Ralph Flanders and Stephen Kelley, a Montpelier public relations consultant, as early as June 1949, though he was far from making a decision.²⁰

Vermont's current representative was Charles Plumley, a seventy-five-year-old lawyer who had first entered politics three years before Edson was born. He had been in Congress since 1934 and was well regarded by the voters, but there were indications that he might retire or that a more progressive Republican might be able to defeat him. Just before Christmas a national radio broadcast announced that a group of Vermonters was trying to persuade Edson to run against Plumley. It happened that the commissioner had a press conference already scheduled for the next day concerning minor state police business. To the inevitable questions

he encountered there, Edson answered that the report was “news to me.” Very likely the event was orchestrated as a trial balloon to test public reaction to the notion, an interpretation supported by Edson’s reiterated remark that he did not intend to run against Aiken. He made no such promise regarding Plumley’s seat.²¹

In spring 1950 Edson canvassed editors of the state’s leading newspapers to determine the amount of support he might receive. They gave him a generally warm response, and most estimated that he could probably beat Plumley, though it might be a tough race. They thought he might have more of an uphill battle if there were several challengers or if one of the other well-known politicians entered the race. Despite Edson’s status as a military hero, he had spent too little time in the state to develop a strong following. One public opinion survey ranked him only forty-fourth among Vermont’s most influential leaders, well behind several potential opponents, including Plumley. More disconcerting was the news that Robert Mitchell, editor of the important *Rutland Herald*, would not endorse him in the race. He told Edson that he was “no politician” and had “no business being in Congress anyway.”²²

In mid-May Plumley announced his retirement from politics. Within days several people indicated they would run for his seat. Although Edson refused to commit himself to the race, reports mentioned him as a likely candidate. Some editorial reaction was positive, but not all. Several other factors discouraged Edson from running. In his estimation the number of candidates and the lack of strong, broad-based support reduced his odds of winning to less than fifty-fifty. That conflicted with an oft-stated policy of his: “I never willingly entered any scrap that I did not expect to win.” (He considered the unification battles an exception because they were “moral” ones.) More important was the cost, estimated at up to \$20,000. Since the statute creating his position specifically forbade his participation in an election, he would have had to give up his job and its income for several months and then look for a new position if he lost. Given his minuscule savings, he thought that an unwise risk. He was even more concerned about fundraising after Ballou, his friend and banker, turned down his request to serve as campaign treasurer. Finally, his political patron and strongest ally, Ernest Gibson, had accepted a nomination to the federal judiciary at the end of 1949 and was not available to assist him. In early June, with all those negative considerations in mind, Edson reluctantly announced his decision not to run.²³

Edson did not give up his desire for elected office; he merely postponed it. He continued his intensive schedule of public appearances and kept a close watch on political developments. Editor Mitchell may have been right when he said that Edson was “no politician,” but the retired general

had all the makings of a solid choice for Congress. He had strong convictions and was not afraid to make them known even when they were unpopular.

In March 1950, while he was still a potential candidate, he attacked Senator Joseph McCarthy's anticommunism campaign as "rule by smearing" and repeatedly objected to legislation seeking to outlaw communism (what eventually became the McCarran Act). He lumped those efforts and the drive for defense unification together as threats to democracy. "It is in such times that our freedom is most imperiled, for unscrupulous men will play upon our fears to gather unwarranted power unto themselves." He noted that the Emancipation Proclamation was a century old, but "there are many who will say that emancipation of the negro has not yet been reached." He also supported the United Nations. In 1950 few of those positions were very popular, particularly in the Republican party. His stand against McCarthy was especially revealing because the senator was one of the strongest legislative supporters of the Marine Corps.²⁴

On June 25, 1950, the North Korean army invaded South Korea and embroiled the United States in an unexpected war. Courageous battlefield fighting by marines and politically inept criticism of the Corps by Truman led Congress to pass a bill giving the marine commandant a voice in the deliberations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and permanently fixing the strength of the Corps at no less than three divisions and three air wings. For Edson, it was a very limited legislative victory, since it did nothing to reverse the flow of power to the Department of Defense and the JCS. In fact, the war emergency led to changes that he considered "dangerous precedents." In September 1950 Truman nominated George Marshall to head the Department of Defense. The 1947 National Security Act contained a provision preventing any former military officer from serving as secretary of defense for ten years after leaving active duty, but Congress voted to waive that restriction and approve Marshall's appointment. Edson was especially worried about the retired army general because he had been a major proponent of the original unification scheme. In his opinion Congress had put the fox in charge of the henhouse.²⁵

The Korean War may have saved the Marine Corps, but it was a source of some consternation for Edson. He had retired in 1947 on the assumption that there would be no major conflict before he reached mandatory retirement age in 1957. Now he had to stand on the platform and watch a train depart with the Marine Corps reserve unit he had helped create in Montpelier. It did not bother him much at first, but as the war expanded and dragged on, he wished that he were "in the hills of Korea instead of the hills of Vermont." This was not the first time he regretted his decision to retire. In March 1948, with the Berlin crisis just getting under

way and a war scare sweeping the nation, he had looked into the possibility of a recall to active service. He told one marine then that if he thought he had passed up the chance to command a division in combat, he would "kick himself all over the place." But in fall and winter 1950, with the 1st Marine Division covering itself in glory at Inchon and the Chosin Reservoir, Edson found himself relegated to a featured position in a *Time* magazine story recounting the division's World War II history.²⁶

In January 1951 Edson talked to General Clifton Cates about returning to active duty. The commandant suggested there might be a spot for him and told him to file a formal request. Edson complied because he wanted to fight, but he sensed that "a field command is almost beyond the pale of possibility." Cates's reply confirmed his expectations: the commandant had no intention of recalling any retired officers to active duty at present; if he did bring Edson out of retirement, it would be to serve at headquarters.²⁷ As it turned out, Edson's wartime service was limited to civil defense work related to his duties as commissioner.

Edson had troubles closer to home in early 1951. Lee Emerson, the toughest political critic of the state police, won the governorship in November 1950. In his inaugural address he dwelled at length on a proposal to merge Edson's department with the Department of Motor Vehicles. Although the governor billed it as a cost-saving measure, Edson was certain his true goals were to cement ties with the powerful sheriffs, who stood to gain from the change, and to reorganize the public safety commissioner's position out of existence so he could bring in his own man to fill the new billet. By law Emerson could not otherwise cut short the retired general's six-year term except for malfeasance. Edson canceled all his out-of-state activities in February to concentrate on winning this latest "merger fight."²⁸

With years of experience working the halls of Congress, Edson was well prepared for this legislative struggle. He developed a document detailing facts and figures that undercut the governor's claim of fiscal savings and used it to sway representatives and the media. The bill narrowly passed its first vote in the Vermont House, and friends noted that they had never seen Edson "so down hearted and pessimistic." Further efforts by opponents overcame the initial appeal of the cost-cutting measure, however, and the bill went down to a decisive and final defeat (142 to 89) at its second reading in mid-April. Edson's dislike for Emerson showed through when he gloated in private at "beat[ing] the little s.o.'s ears back to where they belonged."²⁹

The political crisis in spring 1951 forced Edson to reassess his future in Vermont. He had won the battle, but in defeating the "major plank in the governor's legislative program," he had widened the rift between

himself and the man he would have to work with for at least the next year and a half. And Emerson had been successful in preventing the needed increase in the department's budget, which only added to the difficulty of the commissioner's job.³⁰

But that was not the main problem. Edson had come north in 1947 with the goal of eventual election to the U.S. Congress. He had expected that the position as commissioner would help him build "prestige and a friendly and receptive atmosphere" among Vermont's voters. Instead, he had been embroiled in controversy of one sort or another for most of his four years in office. Even if those difficulties would not prevent him from winning an election, he had not become an overwhelming favorite. In between the initial victory of Emerson's police merger bill and its final defeat, Edson lost whatever taste he had once had for the political arena: "As I have watched politics of the worst kind being played here in the State during the past nine months and more, I realize more and more how little stomach I have for it—and I am glad I made the decision which I did last spring. My skin is not thick enough; nor do I have the ability to play the game below the belt as it is being played here now."³¹

His options for staying in Vermont were not promising. Once he gave up his political dreams, all he had left was his position as commissioner. That meant continuing fights with the governor, with no assurance that whoever sat in the executive office two years hence would reappoint Edson to the job. General Cates also had just informed him that there was no prospect of a return to active duty. There was only one other line of work that Edson knew anything about, and chance stepped in to provide a ready solution to his dilemma. In early May 1951 Edson's close friend C. B. Lister died after a long illness. That left vacant Lister's position as the National Rifle Association's executive director, the top full-time position in the organization. With his background as a competitive shooter, his standing as a national hero, and his ties to the NRA, Congress, and the military, Edson was a natural for the job. On May 8 the NRA offered him the position at a salary more than twice what he was making in Vermont. Edson took it.³²

He kept the decision a closely held secret until June 15, when he informed the governor and made a public announcement. The move came as a surprise to everyone, and there was much speculation over his motives. He explained simply that it was "a better job," but many assumed the police merger battle had something to do with it. Most were sorry to see him go. His troopers appreciated his fair-minded, commonsense approach and his efforts to improve their working conditions and pay. One paper remarked upon his ability to adapt to the procedures of civilian life after so many years in the military. Even Emerson, in accepting

Edson's resignation, commended him on "a splendid job." Mitchell, the editor who had played a substantial part in dissuading Edson from politics, had fulsome praise for him, too: "Vermont has lost an outstanding man as head of the state police, . . . a man who has an illustrious place in the history of our state and nation."³³

NOTES

¹ *Rutland Herald*, 22 January 1954, box 39; *Burlington Free Press*, 12 June 1947, box 36, Edson Papers (EP), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Public Act 163, 18 April 1947; "25th Anniversary of the Department of Public Safety," Vermont State Archives (VSA). The 20,000 documents in the Edson Papers at the Library of Congress are an unusually complete collection representing the general's life from his childhood to his death. His military personnel and health records, held by the Veterans Administration and the National Personnel Records Center, provide additional valuable personal information.

² *Burlington Daily News*, 17 June 1947, box 36, EP.

³ Gibson biographical file, VSA; Edson to Connors, 18 May 1947, box 8, EP; Ballou to Edson, 3 February 1947, Ballou Papers (BP), possession of the Ballou family, Chester, Vermont.

⁴ "Comparison of Pay Data," box 17; diary, May-June 1947, box 56, EP.

⁵ *Burlington Free Press*, 2 July 1947, box 36; speech, 1 July 1947, box 15, EP.

⁶ Department of Public Safety, General Orders Nos. 1, 2, and 3; Gibson to Edson, 9 September 1947; Edson to Gibson, 27 August and 14 October 1947, VSA.

⁷ Record of public appearances, 1947-1951, box 28; radio speech, 7 January 1948, and speech, 29 September 1947, box 15, EP.

⁸ Edson to Gibson, "Report for Fiscal Year 1948," 10 January 1949; Edson to Gibson, 1 April 1948, VSA.

⁹ Edson to Emerson, 12 and 21 June 1948; Emerson to Edson, 17 June 1948, box 8; *Burlington Free Press*, 25 June 1948, box 37; Edson to Stiff, 27 May 1948, box 13, EP; Glenn Davis, interview by the author, August 1992.

¹⁰ *Brattleboro Reformer*, 30 December 1947, box 36; *Rutland Herald*, 26 July 1948, *Burlington Daily News*, 26 July and 5 September 1948, and *Burlington Free Press*, 2 January 1948, box 37; speech, 7 November 1947, box 15; Edson to Wood, 3 August 1948, box 28, EP; Edson to Gibson, 18 October 1947, VSA.

¹¹ *Burlington Free Press*, 5 September 1948, box 37, EP.

¹² Edson to Avery, 27 July 1949, VSA; *Boston Sunday Post*, 15 October 1950, box 9; radio speech, 11 February 1948, box 15, EP.

¹³ Edson to his wife, 26 September, 17 October, 18 November 1947, box 2, EP.

¹⁴ Hanson Baldwin, "The Military Moves In," *Harper's*, December 1947, 481-484; Edson to Baldwin, 19 December 1947 and 15 January 1948; Heintz to Edson, 9 and 23 January 1948, box 13, EP.

¹⁵ Senator Ralph Flanders to Edson, 17 March 1948; Heintz to Edson, 29 February 1948, box 13; speeches, 11 and 27 March 1948, box 15; Edson to Ferdinand Eberstadt, 23 August 1948; Jenks to Edson, 4 October 1948, box 13, EP.

¹⁶ Edson to Hittle, 26 November 1948, box 13; Schatzel to Edson, 20 November 1947, box 8, EP.

¹⁷ *Washington Post*, 25 April 1949, box 37; speech, 30 May 1949, box 15, EP.

¹⁸ Edson to his sister, 4 July 1949, uncataloged; appointment book, 24 August 1949, box 3, EP; Edson, "Power-Hungry Men in Uniform," *Collier's*, 27 August 1949, 16-17, 65.

¹⁹ Edson to his wife, 19 October 1949, box 2, EP.

²⁰ Clippings, October 1949, box 37; appointment book, 7 and 21 June 1949, box 3; "Who's Who in Vermont," box 36; Kelley to Edson, 7 November 1949, box 9, EP.

²¹ Appointment book, 21-22 December 1949, box 3; *Burlington Free Press*, 23 December 1949, box 37; Mari Tomasi, "Vermont: Its Government, 1948-1950," box 52, EP.

²² Edson to Ballou, 27 April 1950, box 23, EP; Robert W. Mitchell, "Vermont's World War II Generals," *Vermont Sunday Magazine*, 8 November 1987.

²³ Edson to Ballou, 27 April 1950, box 23; Ballou to Edson, 1 May 1950, box 32; clippings, May-June 1950, box 37; Edson to his sister, 25 January 1947, uncataloged, EP.

²⁴ Speeches, 13-14 October and 8 November 1947, box 15; Edson, "Vermont's Heritage," box 49; Edson to Hittle, 12 December 1949, box 13; *Rutland Daily Herald*, 31 March 1950, uncataloged, EP.

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²⁵ *Burlington Daily News*, 14 September 1950, box 12; Edson to Douglas, 14 September 1950, box 13, EP.

²⁶ *Burlington Free Press*, 12 August 1950, uncataloged; Edson to Stevenson, 31 October 1950, box 28; Edson to VanNess, 18 August 1950, box 24; Edson to Shepherd, 26 March 1948; Edson to Thomas, 8 April 1951, box 8, EP; Houston Stiff, interview by the author, September 1991; *Time*, 14 August 1950, 19.

²⁷ Edson to Cates, 6 April 1951; Edson to Thomas, 8 April 1951; Cates to Edson, 20 April 1951, box 8, EP.

²⁸ Edson to Walt, 13 February 1951, box 24; Edson to Lee, 10 March 1951, box 8, EP.

²⁹ Walt to Edson, 3 May 1951; Edson to Thomas, 19 June 1951, box 8; Edson to Crane, 28 March 1951, box 9; Edson to Mitchell, 9 July 1952, box 26; *Rutland Daily Herald*, 19 April 1951, box 37, EP.

³⁰ *Rutland Daily Herald*, 19 April 1951, box 37, EP.

³¹ Edson to Connors, 16 May 1947; Edson to Thomas, 8 April 1951, box 8; "Comparison of Pay Data," box 17, EP.

³² Edson to Parker, 21 May 1951; Edson to Gibson, 19 June 1951, box 9, EP; Edson to Ballou, 2 June 1951, BP.

³³ *Burlington Free Press*, 18 June 1951, and *Rutland Daily Herald*, 16 and 22 June 1951, box 37; Emerson to Edson, 15 June 1951, box 8, EP; Edson to Gibson, 3 December 1948, Gibson Papers, VSA; Glenn Davis interview.