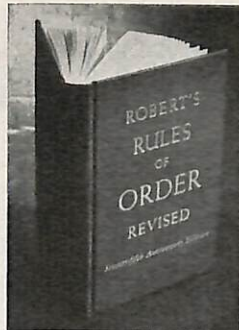




Brig. Gen. Henry Martyn Robert, West Point, 1857. His famous book has become the bible of parliamentary procedure.



By
HODDING
CARTER

The Clubwoman's Best Friend



Mrs. Sarah Corbin Robert, daughter-in-law of the general, who now serves as trustee for *Robert's Rules of Order Revised*.

How a general named Robert laid down the law for generations of club-joining Americans.

My wife, like millions of other American wives, is an enthusiastic joiner of clubs. More than that, she has the knack of getting herself elected club president.

Club presidents, of course, have to preside over meetings. Were it otherwise, we would not have met Sarah Corbin Robert, a handsome, white-haired woman, much of whose life has been dedicated to the unusual career of professional parliamentarian—essentially, an unscrambler or preventer of scrambled gatherings. Nor would we have learned of her late father-in-law, Brig. Gen. Henry Martyn Robert, a West Pointer of the class of 1857, whose *Rules of Order* has guided three generations of Americans through the mazes of parliamentary conduct.

Our meeting could have been forecast one evening when I was alternately reading and

cat-napping, unaware that the president of the Greenville Garden Club was giving voice to a problem. "I guess I'll have to check *Robert's Rules of Order*," my wife said—and then, accusingly, "You weren't even listening."

Defensively I asked, "Who was Roberts?" My wife said that it wasn't "Roberts," but "Robert," and that was all she knew.

Two letters, one telephone call and three months later, we found ourselves in a mellow brick house in Annapolis, close by the river Severn, the home of Sarah Robert and her son, Henry Martyn Robert III; a home that is a shrine to General Robert, who died in 1923, aged eighty-six years, and headquarters for perpetuation of the rules which he drew up so long ago.

His daughter-in-law, Mrs. Robert, is a self-effacing woman. So it may be best to start

with the *Rules of Order*, first brought out in 1876 and, since then, five times revised and enlarged. To most chairmen of meetings, the *Rules* book is more useful than a gavel.

The odds are great that if you have ever belonged to any organization—a Boy Scout troop, a Parent Teacher Association, a labor union, a civic or patriotic group, a political party, a church circle—you have been guided, rebuffed, sat down, stood up, vindicated, frustrated and adjourned under rules of democratic procedure to whose formation General Robert devoted much of his adult life.

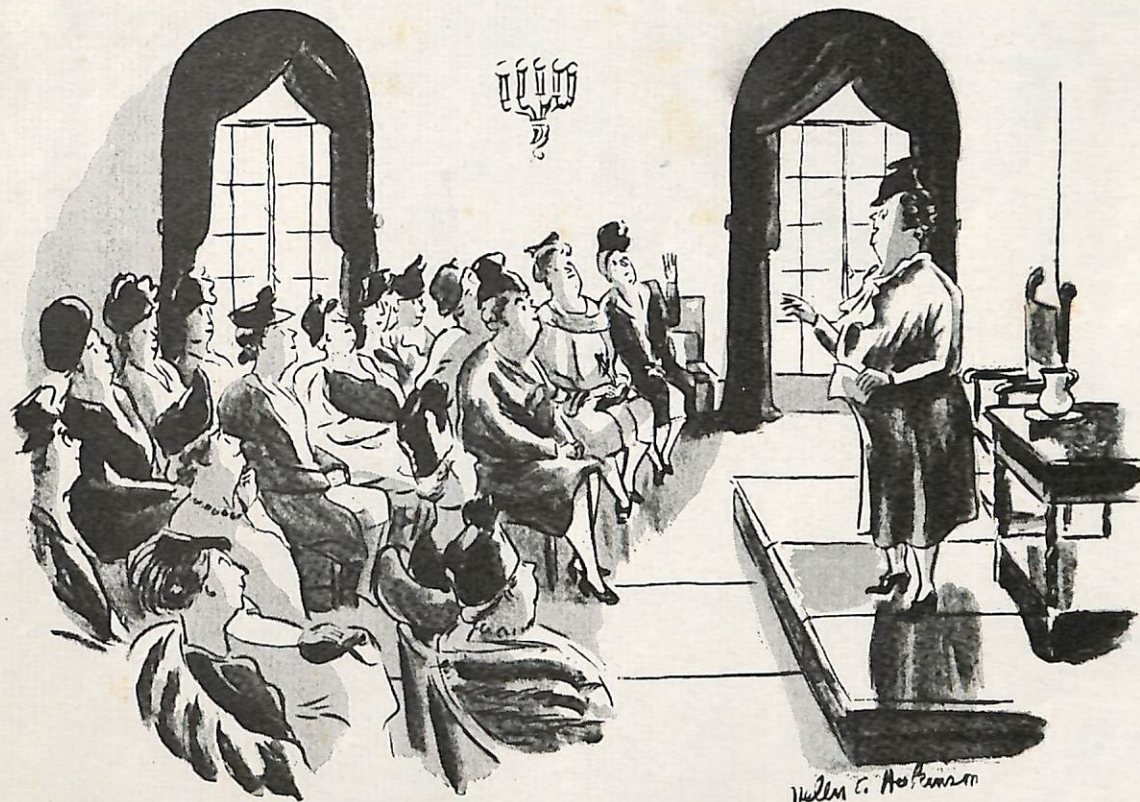
Robert's Rules of Order, the 80,000-word parliamentary guide, published in its first version eighty-five years ago, is the nation's most widely circulated handbook on parliamentary procedure. It has sold some 2,000,000 copies. It has been printed in Braille. It has outsold such favorites as *Tarzan of the Apes*, Emily Post's *Etiquette* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. It has inspired *New Yorker* cartoons, a cover for the *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia*, and such verses as this:

Give a gal a gavel,
Enthrallingest of tools,
And watch the lady travel
The realm of Robert's Rules.

Only the Bible itself has had greater influence on the organizational behavior of Americans. The constitutions of thousands of American clubs provide that if any problems arise which are not covered by the club rules, *Robert's Rules of Order* shall be accepted as final authority. As one observer has remarked, the book has prevented or stopped a million fights.

This long-lived handbook had its origins in the embarrassment of a young Army lieutenant, who, in 1863, could not keep order at a cantankerous meeting at a Baptist church in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Henry Robert was there to direct the strengthening of the port's defenses against possible Confederate naval raiders. Invited to preside, he decided during the wild meeting that if he got out of it alive, he would learn how to control the next one he became involved in—if ever. Some eight or ten years later, as

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"It has been moved that our recording secretary send a summary of today's discussion to Marshal Tito. Do I hear a second?"

The Clubwoman's Best Friend

(Continued from Page 25)

a captain stationed in California and the Northwest, the resolve crystallized.

Sarah Robert told us how *Robert's Rules of Order* began and much about its author. Ever since her husband's death, twenty-three years ago, she has been a very busy woman. She serves as parliamentary or parliamentary consultant for all manner of national organizations, and reviews scores of proposed bylaws and manuscripts of books, booklets and charts whose authors want permission to cite her father-in-law's *Rules* as authority.

There is an incredible diversity in the organizations with which she has worked: Engineering societies, labor unions, departments of public information, church trustees, the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution—she is a past president general—and various patriotic, medical and special-interest societies in the fifty states. When we met her, she was preparing to leave for an American Nurses Association convention. Even a sampling of correspondents seeking to be put on the right procedural paths is breath-taking: Rotary International, the Rural Letter Carriers Association, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Young Women's Christian Association, Zonta International, the American National Red Cross, the Army Language School, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Guild for the Hard of Hearing, the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, the League of Women Voters, the Women's Auxiliary of the Tillimook County Sheriff's Mounted Posse.

Some of the inquiries she deals with are amusing; most of them are complicated. Here are a few, condensed into question-and-answer form.

Question: An honorary state regent has been elected regent of her own chapter, which means she occupies two voting offices. Can she cast two votes in state conferences?

Answer: She cannot. Only one vote is permitted to a person.

Question: A city council has seven members. Six are present, together with the mayor, who has no vote except in case of a tie. On a controversial issue three votes were cast for the proposal, two against; one councilman declined to vote. The mayor ruled that the member who abstained should be counted as being against the measure, thus creating a tie, which he broke with his own vote, a no. Is this proper?

Answer: No. The mayor had no right to rule the abstention as being either for or against the matter.

Question: The chairman of a meeting, in hot dispute over election of officers, accepted a motion that nominations be closed while a member was trying to get the floor to make a nomination. Should the chairman have accepted the motion?

Answer: The chairman should not have done so. Until a reasonable time has been given to make nominations, the motion to close them is out of order. Normally—except in very large meetings—when there are no further nominations, the chair will declare them closed.

Question after question. What do you do in case a club is tied on the election of a president and there is no provision to break a tie? Can an organization spend money before it is actually earned? Can the chair vote when an assembly is one person shy of a quorum? Does a membership have to be notified in advance of a proposed amendment or abolishment of a standing rule?

"Even lawyers have consulted me on parliamentary matters that have come

up in their conventions," Mrs. Robert says. "The starting point for every solution is to find the principle involved. Take, for example, the common misconception that members of the nominating committee are automatically barred from becoming nominees for office. If that were true, it would mean that serving on the nominating committee would carry a penalty. And besides, appointment to the committee could be used to prevent a member from becoming a nominee. It boils down to the principle that service to an organization should not deprive a member of a right open to other members who decline such service."

What are the greatest obstacles to the smooth running of organizations?

"The two that probably outweigh all others are bad bylaws and the failure to think through in advance the results that are likely to follow a specific action.

"The new president of a state organization once asked me, 'What are the duties of a jurisprudence committee? The bylaws say I must appoint one, but they don't say what it does. I couldn't help her. I thought that if this society didn't know what its committee was to do, it

... ..

Compensation

By Irene Magee

Eroded by the constant flow,
The rocks in midstream go
Sooner to sand than those that
lie

Shore-safe, sun-warm and dry;
Yet, polished by the water's
thrust,
Perhaps they make a brighter
dust.

... ..

was likely that there was no need for it. The average organization should stick to the simplest wording that will meet its needs, without copying the specialized machinery sometimes necessary for professional groups."

"But Sarah Robert would rather talk about General Robert and his work than about her own. South Carolina-born, a member of an aristocratic Huguenot-descended family, General Robert was appointed to the United States Military Academy from Ohio—his antislavery father had moved to the Middle West when Henry was a youngster—and was graduated as an engineer in 1857. After a year of teaching science at the academy, the studious lieutenant was dispatched to Washington Territory with a detachment of soldiers to build a military road from Vancouver to Puget Sound.

To reach the far West, Lieutenant Robert and the thirty men under him had to sail to Panama, cross the Isthmus by rail and take another ship on the Pacific side. On this journey he contracted Chagres Fever—a virulent malaria—which would return to handicap him many times afterward. During the Civil War, suffering intermittently from attacks of the fever, he constructed harbor defenses at Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and in New Bedford, where he was made chairman of the fateful meeting at the Baptist church.

In 1867 he was made chief engineer of the Division of the Pacific. From then until his retirement in 1901, he directed some thirty-three military engineering enterprises, among them the improve-

ment of the harbors of New York, Philadelphia and Pensacola, and eventually became chief of the United States Army Engineers. He died on May 11, 1923, in Hornell, New York, leaving a widow, the former Isabel Hoagland of Owego, New York, his devoted assistant in revising of the *Rules*; and three daughters and a son by his deceased first wife, Helen Thresher.

Mrs. Robert is proud that throughout her father-in-law's career as soldier and parliamentary authority he found time to serve his church and his convictions. In San Francisco, as chief of the Division of the Pacific, he founded the Chinese Rescue Mission to aid destitute Orientals after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. He was treasurer of the Society for the Rescue of Fallen Women, of whom there were many; his associates sought out the streetwalkers night and day to persuade them to change their way of life.

It was in California that his resolve to draw up a guide to orderly procedures began to take shape, prompted by experiences in San Francisco, where he had plunged into civic life. Other new citizens had varying ideas of how to run meetings. For their guidance Robert wrote in 1869 a preliminary parliamentary digest of eight pages, printed from type he himself had purchased. He revised his text for four more years before he was ready to bring forth the *Rules*.

"He decided that what was needed most of all was simplicity and uniformity," Mrs. Robert explains. "So he set about adapting principally the rules of the United States Congress to everyday use. When there was no rule, he would make up what he thought was a logical one to meet a particular need."

The road to eventual publication was a rough one. Transferred from the West Coast to Milwaukee, Henry Robert arrived just before New Year's Day of 1874 and found a few weeks of leisure to write the *Rules*. The next autumn he revised his manuscript. A 40,000-word version was curtly rejected by a New York publisher. Major Robert then made a tentative agreement with the proprietors of the leading bookstore in Milwaukee to publish 1000 copies of the *Rules*, with the privilege of publishing 10,000 additionally if the book caught on, the profits to be divided equally. But the booksellers backed out before the manuscript was ready for the printers.

"He wouldn't give up," says Sarah Robert. "Instead he decided to have his book printed under his own direction and at his own expense." So, early in 1875, he arranged for a job-printing firm in Milwaukee to print 4000 copies, with type he would select and on paper he would furnish.

And now Major Robert was ready to turn from his role as soldier and logician to that of publicity man. He sent one copy of the *Rules* to S. C. Griggs of the Griggs Publishing Company of Chicago, parent company of the present publishers, Scott, Foresman and Company of Chicago. With the copy went a note: If Mr. Griggs cared to publish the book, Major Robert would meet him in Chicago.

The book was returned two weeks later, with a letter saying the publisher would be glad to see him. Disconcertingly, the leaves of the returned book were still uncut. Major Robert went to Chicago anyhow. Mr. Griggs told him he would like to publish the book if he could figure out a way to sell it. But the major was unknown to the public, and an existing book, Cushing's *Manual*, was all but synonymous with parliamentary law. And 4000 copies! No publisher would dare print more than 500 copies of a work by an unknown author, especially such

Man, there's a big difference!

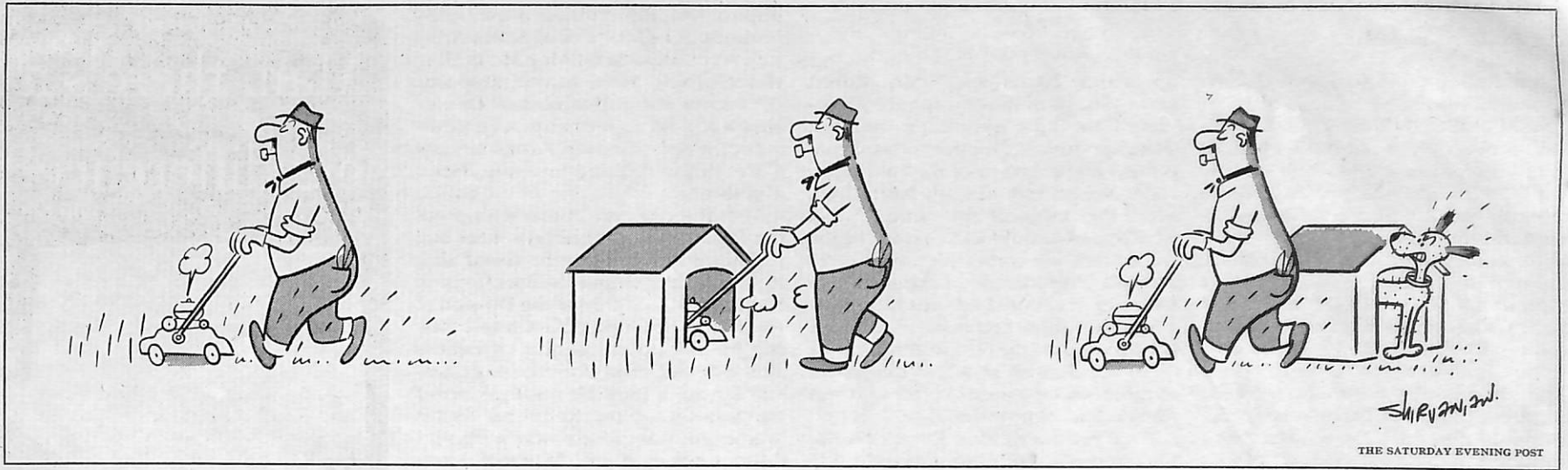


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a work. It would be mighty difficult selling indeed.

Major Robert had a suggestion, one which he would delight in recalling to the end of his days. He told Mr. Griggs that he had printed 4000 copies because he intended to give away 1000 copies and he wanted enough more to last two years, so as to provide ample time for public criticism—useful in later revising. The 1000 books would be sent to 1000 of the best parliamentarians in the nation. If he was mistaken as to what the people needed to guide their deliberative assemblies, he would hear from the experts. The publisher would lose nothing, since the major was paying for the books anyhow. On the other hand, if the sample copies evoked favorable comment, Mr. Griggs and the author would be off to a flying start.

Mr. Griggs was impressed. He drew up a contract which the major found agreeable. By February, 1876, the *Rules of Order* was ready, two years after Major Robert had commenced writing it.

On February sixteenth the 1000 review copies were mailed to governors, legislators, university presidents, attorneys and the like, throughout the nation. Enthusiastic comments began to pour in. Within six weeks Griggs asked the major to prepare copy for an expanded new edition; the *Rules* had already been adopted as a textbook in several colleges. Major Robert expanded the new edition from 176 to 192 pages. The first edition was exhausted a month before the new one was ready.

Many years later, when he had retired from the Army, General Robert settled with his second wife Isabel in her home town of Owego. The general was now famous, and so was his book. The first year, he and Isabel took an apartment on one side of a house overlooking the Susquehanna. A family named Corbin lived in the rest of the house. Sarah Corbin was the younger daughter.

Listening to Sarah Corbin Robert today, you get the feeling that it was the old general—his bearing still erect, his eyes still bright, his beard neatly cropped—who was her first love. But it is only a guess; for while she told us all we asked about the father, his son and the *Rules*, it was not easy to learn as much about her. At Eastertime that first year Henry Jr.—years older than Sarah—came to visit his father. That was the only time she ever saw her future husband until 1918.

When the two did meet again, Sarah was teaching history at Atlantic City High School, and Henry Jr. was instructor in mathematics at the United States Naval Academy. Later, as professor of mathematics at Annapolis and a nationally noted parliamentarian, he would demonstrate the family's versatility by teaching parliamentary law at the summer sessions of Columbia University.

Between her first meeting with Henry Jr. and her marriage to him in 1919, Sarah Corbin had become a warm friend of General Robert and his wife. During that first winter in Owego the general would spend entire evenings telling stories to her brother and herself. He taught

them how to make military maps and how to build pontoon bridges and how to get along in Indian country and how far a horse could travel in a day in flat country.

When Sarah was in college at Syracuse, her fellow students thought she must know something about parliamentary law because she had an autographed copy of the *Rules*, the general's gift.

"That was their idea," she told us. "My serious involvement began a year or so after I was married. The general—this was near the end of his life—asked me to go over the manuscripts of his last two books, *Parliamentary Practice* and *Parliamentary Law*, for my reactions as a former high-school teacher. A little while after these were finished, I began to study under my husband at Columbia."

She must have been an apt pupil, for during the summer of 1933 Henry Jr. sent her to Columbia as his substitute when he could not leave the Naval Academy.

Twenty years before Henry Robert Jr. died, the general made him trustee of *Robert's Rules of Order Revised*. At the death of Henry Jr., in 1937, his sisters and the general's widow asked Sarah Robert to carry on as her husband's successor. And so she has, for twenty-three years. Since Isabel and the sisters are all now dead, Sarah keeps up the work on behalf of the general's grandchildren, among them her son, Henry III.

When she speaks today on the principles underlying the *Rules*, she punctuates her explanations with such solid aphorisms of the general—many of them to be found in the *Rules*—as these:

The chairman should never forget that to control others it is necessary to control oneself. No rules will take the place of tact and common sense on the part of the chairman.

A two-thirds vote should be required for any action limiting a parliamentary right of any individual member in an assembly.

The great lesson for democracies to learn is for the majority to give to the minority a full, free opportunity to present their side of the case, and then for the minority, having failed to win a majority to their view, gracefully to submit and to recognize the action as that of the entire organization and cheerfully to assist in carrying it out, until they can secure its repeal.

The man who wrote these maxims left a valuable legacy to his fellow citizens. His *Rules of Order* offered, for the first time, a sound parliamentary system adapted to the needs of all types of organizations and to occasional meetings where no such system existed before. Throughout his lifetime, until his death at eighty-six, he added to the success of the *Rules* by answering every letter asking for parliamentary aid. So did his son, and so does his son's widow, Sarah Robert, today. Excepting her father-in-law, Sarah Corbin Robert probably has quieted more verbally embattled Americans than anyone else in our history. In her view, the *Rules of Order* "provide the guideposts by which a free people can proceed fairly to voluntary decisions in matters great and small."

My club-president wife agrees, and in our house that's as good as a motion to adjourn.

The Base That Never Was (Continued from Page 33)

Air Force started looking for a site to base interceptor planes to protect the Chicago-Milwaukee area. In 1954 it settled on an area about midway between the two cities, eighteen miles inland from Lake Michigan. The following year Congress appropriated \$16,608,000 to start construction—a mere down payment on the estimated \$103,000,000 it was to cost to build and equip the base.

The 5500-acre field was named for Richard I. Bong, a Poplar, Wisconsin, farm boy who shot down forty Japanese planes in World War II, won a Congressional Medal of Honor, then was killed in California while testing a jet. When the base was planned, our defense depended largely on airplanes. No one could then be sure when missiles would replace them.

The fact that the base was to be built on \$300-an-acre farm land and beneath one of the nation's busiest air corridors

brought grumbling from farmers and airline officials, backed up by some congressmen, state legislators and newspaper editorial writers. But it was hard to argue with a military decision that here was the best place to locate planes which might someday rise to save Chicago and Milwaukee from destruction.

In the spring of 1955, all was uncertainty around Kansasville, Wisconsin. Some of its 100 residents hurried over to look at a marker that had suddenly sprouted behind home plate in the town baseball field. It warned of a \$250 fine if anyone tampered with this symbol that the United States Government was surveying the land. As farmers planted corn, they weren't sure that they would ever harvest the crop. Leo Walker, whose 150 acres had been in the family for four generations, recalls how he turned his mower just in time to save a mallard's nest in his field that spring, then wondered whether

the duck would soon be driven away by bulldozers.

In the town of Brighton, south of Kansasville, Mrs. Matt Weiss remembered how she had once cajoled a highway-department crew into sparing the handsome old oaks in front of her farmhouse. Now the trees were threatened again. Her husband wanted to know how, at seventy-nine, a man could put down new roots elsewhere. He looked out toward the rolling hills that he loved and demanded, "Where else can you get a view like that?"

At a meeting that fall, 800 farmers filled Dover Town Hall, standing five deep around its walls and overflowing into an adjacent garage. Each had one question to ask Brig. Gen. William H. Wise, head of an Air Force information team: "Will you take my farm?" But Wise didn't know. The Government would require a little over half of the 9000 acres being surveyed. Most of the

farmers, he told them, would be able to harvest their winter wheat next summer.

As it turned out, many of them were still working their land two years after that meeting. The Air Force ran into problems. The Civil Aeronautics Board, concerned about the effect Bong's planes would have on commercial air traffic, held a series of conferences with the military. It was agreed to move the site about a mile south to reduce interference with civilian flying, particularly on the Milwaukee-St. Louis run, and to redesign the runway pattern. Even so, the CAB approved the plans reluctantly, capitulating to the necessity of defending the cities from attack.

It was early 1957 before the Government began buying land from fifty-nine owners, most of them Brighton farmers. Nearby residents still had misgivings, despite assurances by an Air Force colonel that the jets would "just go swish"