

F. Nordy Hoffmann

Senate Sergeant at Arms, 1975-1981

Preface

by Donald A. Ritchie

On April 7, 1789, the Senate elected its first Door-Keeper, to guard the doors to its chamber where it met for its first five years in closed session. By 1798 it adopted the title "Sergeant at Arms," which was combined with that of Door-Keeper, and which continues to supervise the work of the now many Doorkeepers around the chamber and its galleries. Over the years the Senate steadily added new responsibilities to the post of Sergeant at Arms, assigning it control over wagon masters, pages, telecommunications and computer services. The Sergeant at Arms also supervises Senate protocol and security.

During the time that F. Nordy Hoffmann served as Sergeant at Arms, from 1975 to 1981, he directed 537 police officers, 185 computer specialists, 155 service department employees, 108 managers, 65 janitors, 52 postal workers, 30 parking attendants, 16 recording specialists, nine carpenters, seven barbers, and assorted other staff totaling more than 1200 people, with a \$49 million payroll.

A big man who could fill a big job, Nordy Hoffmann was one Sergeant at Arms who looked like a Sergeant at Arms, observed Democratic Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd. "Nordy stands at 6 foot 3 and weighs close to 300 pounds. He is big enough to arrest and bring to the Senate Chamber any Senator now living." Republican Senator Malcolm Wallop described him as "compelling in stature, obviously, but compelling too in personality and efficiency. During my entire acquaintance with Nordy Hoffmann I never saw a flicker of partisan bias." Nordy Hoffmann was born on December 19, 1909, in Seattle, Washington. He attended high school at St. Martin's, and in 1927 enrolled in Notre Dame University. There during his freshman term he encountered the legendary football coach Knute Rockne, who sized him up on the spot and invited him to try out for his team. Hoffmann played during Rockne's last two seasons, and served as an assistant coach while working on his law degree. (Years later, he was elected to the National Football Foundation's Hall of Fame after being nominated by all 100 senators, Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, and Vice President Walter Mondale.)

During the late 1930s, Hoffmann became an aide to Philip Murray, president of the United Steelworkers of America, and head of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. After service in the navy during the Second World War, he returned to work for Murray, who sent him to Washington to organize lobbying efforts for the Steelworkers. Hoffmann's activities as a lobbyist and his fund raising for Democratic congressional candidates led to his appointment to the staff of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee in 1967. "He served there 8 years, with exceptional effectiveness" said Republican Leader Howard Baker,

"as all of us on this side of the aisle were made painfully aware at the time." As a result of the friendships and associations he made during those years, Nordy Hoffmann was elected Senate Sergeant at Arms in 1975, and held the post until the Republicans won control of the Senate in 1980.

"If there is any story I can think of that characterizes Nordy's years with the Senate, it is this," said Senator Byrd: "When Nordy first came into office, a welcome sign suddenly appeared on the door of the Sergeant at Arms's suite. A welcome sign that meant everyone--Senators, staff, tourists, and other citizens--would be warmly received by the Office of the Sergeant at Arms. Nordy Hoffmann has always accommodated people, whether they were Senators or other citizens. Through his courtesy and 'can-do' spirit, he has earned a solid reputation as everybody's friend."

Nordy Hoffman died in Washington, D.C., on April 5, 1996, at the age of eighty-six.

About the Interviewer:--Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. He has published several articles on American political history and oral history, including "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard Press, 1980); *Heritage of Freedom: History of the United States* (Macmillan, 1985); *The Senate* (Chelsea House, 1988); and *The U.S. Constitution* (Chelsea House, 1989); *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991); and is editor of *Minutes of the U.S. Senate Democratic Conference, 1903-1964*, recently published (Government Printing Office, 1999) and available online in Text and PDF format. He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series) (Government Printing Office, 1978-). A former president of the Oral History Association and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.
