

U.S.S. DAUNTLESS

By Michael Levin

He polished up the handle so carefully,
That now he is the ruler of the Queen's
Navee!

—H.M.S. Pinafore

JOHAN F. LEHMAN, Jr., '74 Gr, doesn't polish many handles these days. But he's polished off everything else in his way the last two years. When Lehman, now 40 years old, took office in 1981 as the 65th Secretary of the United States Navy and the youngest this century, the Navy Department was languishing after 10 straight years of budget cuts. Despite a hefty pay raise, career reenlistments remained a rock-bottom 44%. The fleet was short 20,000 skilled enlisted personnel, down nearly 600 warships from its 1971 strength of 1,000, unable to man many of the remainder. Its first new Trident submarine was 26 months behind schedule, mired in contract disputes. And three Administrations had struggled unsuccessfully to reactivate a single battleship or build one more aircraft carrier.

So Washington laughed when Lehman sat down at the piano and asked for two carriers, plus a 30% increase in the size of the fleet—to what he calls “the symbol of a resurgent Navy,” a 600-ship fleet.

It's not laughing now.

Barely half a term after he preached his first sermon on the Gospel of Necessary Rearmament, John Lehman has his

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Ronald Reagan's Navy Secretary makes no apologies—least of all for his bold course of clear sea superiority over the Russians. The goal, he says, is simple: 'We must be prepared to put them on the bottom if we are challenged. We must be able to go in harm's way and prevail.'

two carriers, plus two battleships and a 14% raise for his sailors and marines. The Navy is building or refitting 106 new combat vessels, more than at any time since the Korean War. The first Trident, the *Ohio*, was delivered in October of 1981, with production of the rest accelerated after Lehman publicly scored their builder for “rip-offs” and switched three boats to another yard. And new contract rules penalize ship-builders 50 cents for every dollar of cost overruns, while granting them 50 cents bounty for each dollar saved.

At the drop of a brass hat, Lehman will rattle off Pentagonese for the upsurge in morale behind these statistics: “career retention approaching 80%, the best 20 months in the history of the Navy . . . recruiting quotas met for 36 straight months . . . carriers 62% ‘mission-capable’ during Carter, 78% now. If there's a problem with the volunteer service, it's the Army's, not ours.” He admits that not all of this is his doing: enlistments always soar during hard times, and the rising tide of the \$200 billion Reagan defense budget lifts every service boat. But with nearly 40% of that budget, the Navy floats higher than

most. And whatever one thinks of projected trillion-dollar defense outlays with unemployment just under 11%—and John Lehman gives a strong impression of not caring what you think if you disagree with him—he has earned high praise for doing what he intended. And for cutting costs while speeding the Navy's growth. In the fierce interservice rivalries of the Pentagon, variously described as a “management nightmare” and “a tankful of hungry sharks, except for the ones that are starving,” he has plainly fed well.

“He just rolled through Congress while [Secretary of Defense Caspar] Weinberger was still thinking about the second carrier,” says one Pentagon official with grudging admiration. “He rides roughshod over the other service secretaries. He's a master at press campaigns, plays hardball against everybody, never gives an inch. And to add insult to injury, he managed to do what Navy Secretaries have been trying for 20 years—retire [Admiral Hyman] Rickover,” who had become an unmanageable thorn in the Navy's side.

“Balanced? The Secretary of the Navy's not supposed to be balanced.”



From the Pentagon, Navy Secretary John Lehman guards the blue parts of the globe.

of Forrestal (whose full-length portrait hangs in Lehman's office) and Paul Nitze (widely regarded as the most effective Secretary of the Sixties, and one of Lehman's mentors) come quickly to Washington minds.

He is certainly not the first lawyer in a post that has been filled by over four dozen, several of whom went on to the Supreme Court.

But he is surely the first Secretary to be the late Princess Grace's cousin, own a national rowing championship, hold two pairs of wings as a naval flight officer, fly "everything I can get my hands on" during regular summer drills as a commander in the active Naval Reserve, and to have written or edited five books on defense issues before he was 37 years old. Though one of his brothers jokingly dismisses the family as "scullers, not scholars," he is the only Secretary with a doctorate in international relations.

According to one former Undersecretary, this combination of "smartness, good academic background, and experience as a pilot in warfare skills" makes Lehman "unique as a Secretary in motivating his people, supporting what they're doing, and arguing for them on the Hill." Adds a naval historian, "He's terrific technically, really knows what he's talking about. For the first time since F.D.R., we have a SECNAV who understands the real technical and operational capacity of aircraft and ships."

BUT IF John Lehman is a paragon, he is a paragon "wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma," to paraphrase another Naval Person. For one thing, he has been in the thick of violent struggles over Vietnam, executive privilege, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (S.A.L.T.) during the last 14 years, and his base is the right wing of the Republican Party. Though he clearly believes in what he's done and calls his role in those affairs "part of my proud record of accomplishment in this town," it has made a host of enemies who are waiting for him to disappear.

For another thing, he is far more complex and formidable than he appears. He seems too slight for the 171 pounds noted on his rowing plaque, until you notice the oarsman's shoulders beneath the Cambridge suits and the long-nosed, slightly jug-eared Irish choirboy's face. He's intensely competitive but relaxed, humorous and uncompulsive, in by 8:30 and out by 6:00, having "learned in my White House days that the 14-hour guys with bags under their eyes became less effective."

adds a former Defense bigwig. "It's not his fault the Secretary of Defense doesn't have sensible priorities to limit what Navy wants."

But to John Lehman, the reasons for his recent success are less ominous. "What I've learned in this job are the virtues of patience and persistence," he says. "The Carter people went away disillusioned because they thought the system was musclebound and nothing worked. . . . But this town works like a Stradivarius if you know how to make it work, if you have the patience to understand the laws of its physics." It is a statement that would amaze old adversaries.

LEHMAN is not the first Penn person to serve as what in government jargon comes out as SECNAV. That honor belongs to Benjamin Stoddert, the very first Secretary of the Navy; Stoddert, a student in the College in 1777, held the Naval post from 1798 to 1801. Adolphe Edward Borie, 1825 C, 1828 G, served as Secretary in 1869. And Thomas S. Gates, Jr., '28 C, '56 Hon, was Eisenhower's Secretary of the Navy from 1957 to 1959 (and then Defense, in 1959 and 1960). Nor is he the first Secretary to see the Navy as an instrument of global security; that view has inhered in the job since its beginnings, and the names

'IF WE HAVE TO SHAVE GOVERNMENT 2%, LET'S TAKE IT OUT OF H.H.S., WHERE THE BUDGET IS LARGER.'

He inhabits a bristling world of top-secret S.L.C.M.s (sea-launched cruise missiles), sitreps (situation reports), avionics mods (modifications), force multipliers, and assets (capital ships). But he will say with disarming candor that the Falklands invasion may have caught Navy Intelligence flat-footed or that carriers might be "sitting ducks": "Sure, they're vulnerable. Everything's vulnerable. But you have to plan to take hits, and a big ship is less vulnerable to lucky kills than a small one. Besides, a carrier provides the dome of air protection that makes it possible for everything else—troopships, sub-hunters—to operate on the surface. If anything has to go [in the budget], carriers will be the last to go."

He has a scholar's love of accuracy but has confessed that "it's impossible to get a precise number for anything out of the Pentagon bureaucracy," is not above firing unreturnable technical salvos at politicians, and knows the value of an avalanche of facts to destroy a debating opponent, though some may later be proved wrong. "I'm not going to live or die on the numbers my office provided," he remarks at one defense panel, to general laughter. "I'll straighten them out when I get back this afternoon."

His whole career has been hard-headed defense strategy based on the double maxim that "It's a harsh world" and "the purpose of defense is deterrence—persuading another that action against us will bring more harm than gain." But he reveres his late uncle George Kelly, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning playwright who wrote *The Show-Off* and *Craig's Wife*, a storyteller, mimic, and folklorist who blew a breath of graceful sophistication into his close-knit family and turned dinners into theatrical events.

His speech has aptly been described as "ripe with the sensuality of power, the machismo of victory." Yet, he instantly names as one of his foremost heroes a woman, Grace Kelly—"the most noble person I know in the sense of having values, personal standards of excellence, and internal discipline."

He will stretch like a cat, neat as a pin in his spotless office with its wingback chairs, Forrestal desk, Bicentennial naval scenes, and framed 1898 letter from Assistant Secretary T. Roosevelt reporting that "Prof. Langley's flying machine . . . has worked," fitting facts into a world-view in which he faces Soviet Admiral Sergei Georgievich Gorshkov

across the globe's chessboard—atop an unruly empire of 550,000 sailors and 190,000 marines, where any engagement could dissolve into chaos.

And though he constantly stresses "balance" in strategy, values, personal conduct, he shows an extraordinary streak of recklessness, as though he were deliberately pushing the system, punishing its limits the way rowing punishes the self.

ABOVE ALL, Lehman loves a good fight and will go out of his way to pick one. In a town of clubby politicians skilled at protecting their flanks with conciliatory words if not conciliatory deeds, he is perfectly capable of calling respected dissenters "wimps," hailing the demise of the challenge to reduce and retrench "as a result of . . . McGovernite influence," and threatening to build subs abroad "if American yards can't do the job"—a remark which drew anguished howls that he meant to let United States shipworkers "live by cutting each other's hair and shining each other's shoes." He has suggested that the Carter doctrine of deterrent presence is bunk, not defense, and repeats that "we cannot accept parity. We must have power superior to the [Soviet] threat"—phrases which even the conservative *Human Events* tags as "dripping with brash confidence."

He has been known to call Senate committee chairmen "mischievous" and "derelict." He has attacked what he calls the "defense reform caucus," stating that "Congress should reform itself first" and that a mix of high and low technology "is fine, as long as we got the high and the bad guys got the low." He has accused Congress and past Administrations, Republican as well as Democratic, of "unilateral disarmament" for cutting crucial pay, modernization, ammo and maintenance accounts to cover glamorous new job-producing weapons systems. And he is likely to respond to suggestions that the planned growth in defense spending be reduced by 2% by licking his chops and asserting that "if we have to shave government 2%, let's take it out of H.H.S. [the Department of Health and Human Services], a new Cabinet agency whose budget is larger than ours."

After Lehman was called on the Pentagon's carpet for such impromptu remarks, one of his aides was heard to say that "We're just here to make sure he doesn't shoot himself in the foot."

But the President continues to echo Lehman's hard defense line, and that pugnacious sense of knowing what the Chief wants is one root of his current stature.

IF YOU WANT to understand John Lehman, you must understand three things: the Navy, where Lehman came from, and the fact that he is a warrior plain-and-simple, in the classic Greek mold.

In a town obsessed with power, much of it illusory, what power there is tends to reside in the Departments of State and Defense. The reason is simple. Domestic programs regulate internal affairs, realign wealth, and protect against harm or distribute benefits. But the nation's existence depends on alliances to keep the United States out of war and the strength to avoid or win one. As United States Ambassador to Turkey Robert Strausz-Hupé, the former Penn professor who is another Lehman mentor, once put it: "The most elaborate system of social security and environmental protection will avail us nothing if we succumb to [foreign] domination. Although national defense is not everything, without national defense, everything is nothing."

That kind of thinking runs deep in the defense establishment, which consists not just of State and Defense but the Armed Services/Foreign Relations Committees, the C.I.A. and White House National Security Council (N.S.C.), and a huge network of civilian contractors, consultants, systems analysts, and strategic scenario-ists. Though it is often called quiet paranoia, the charge is unfair. Like prosecutors who see crime everywhere because that is all they deal with, the establishment exists, and has always existed, to anticipate external threats and counter them promptly if they arise. Whether that threat was the British and French in the early nineteenth century, the Mexicans and Spanish later on, or the Germans, Japanese, and Russians in this era, notions of "trusting the enemy" or "unilateral force reductions" are alien to its being. If it sees black-and-white, it could scarcely do otherwise: its point is to assume the worst, leaving action and gray areas to the moderating Constitutional hand of civilian control.

In this establishment, the Navy has long been preeminent. The reason again is simple. If janitors see the world as furnaces and negligence lawyers see it as



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auto collisions, the Navy has always seen the United States as an island nation, dependent on sea power and overseas access for survival, with the oceans its fortress and the fleet its first line of defense. "War at sea can be bitter and grim," Paul Nitze once noted, "but it seldom results in lasting harm to real estate." The thrust of Lehman's inaugural speech was the same: "From recruit to admiral, we must clarify our mission. We exist to provide maritime supremacy; guarantee naval superiority; and guarantee access to those parts of the world necessary to our survival. . . . We exist to insure that, as an island nation dependent on the seas for our minerals, for our trade and security arrangements, we never lose access . . . through [hostile] military action." From the Barbary Pirates to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the thesis has been tested too often to be disclaimed.

For 160 years, the Secretary of the Navy was a full Cabinet member, the President's long arm and right hand, charged first with sea command to protect the coast from privateers, then with assuring the safety of an expanding commerce, then with executing the big-stick doctrine of "projecting power to the far corners of the globe," then with developing a two-ocean fleet against the Axis threat.

To a considerable extent, the Navy's history is that of the nation. From the beginning, it was caught in tugs of war between Federalists who wanted a big fleet and Jeffersonians who opposed it, port colonies which could profit from a navy and inland states which saw taxes rather than benefits. Its internal battles over coastal or foreign fleets, defen-

sive or offensive fleets, transitions from sail to steam, roundshot to shell, gunnery to aviation, wood to iron to steel, reflect the growth pangs of colonies turning slowly outward, wracked by sectionalism and the industrial revolution but painfully setting a course. Its first permanent foreign patrol, the African Station, was established by the 1820s to intercept slavers and protect the free-black colony of Liberia. It secured California with amphibious landings, ran the blockades and river-patrols which strangled the South, liberated Cuba, Panama, and Mexico, convoyed doughboys to Europe, made the United States a global power during World War II. The first Peacekeeper was not the MX missile, but a monster naval gun which exploded during a V.I.P. demonstration on the Potomac in 1844, killing the Secretaries of Navy and State. The first *Ohio* was a 74-gun three-master commissioned in 1830; a model of it sails proudly in Lehman's outer office. The carrier *Lexington* is the fifth in a line that began with a Revolutionary brig which defeated H.M.S. *Edward* in a 1776 engagement, reporting that "We shattered her in a terrible manner."

Despite this tradition, the Navy has always expanded and contracted like a bellows with the winds of war and peace, shrunk by the rush to demobilize when hostilities end. Its need for cordage and armor created the American hemp and rolled-steel industries. And the Five-Power Disarmament Treaty of 1922 focused on warships, not missiles.

It has always provided lurid examples of waste and corruption: a nineteenth-century warship found to be "of good workmanship but so overweight her

John Lehman, flanked by President Ronald Reagan and Admiral James Watkins, helps recommission the battleship 'New Jersey.'

decks would be several inches under water"; a Secretary alleged to have stolen nearly two million 1870 dollars; a post-Civil War mania for building hundreds of useless *Monitors*; and the all-time champion Federal contract overruns—two ships ordered before 1820 and under intermittent construction for nearly 50 years.

It has been led by the halt and the blind, including one Secretary who remarked on seeing his first ship under construction that "The durned thing's hollow!—I always thought they were solid." Several have been known as "Rowboat Secretaries" for the only ship they ever boarded. F.D.R.'s first Secretary suffered a paralytic stroke before his confirmation and spent the rest of his term being carted about by an aide charged with wiping the Secretary's mouth and translating his stutters.

But it has also been led by a famous historian (George Bancroft), an Adams, a Bonaparte and an Edison, a dozen Roosevelts of every political stripe, and at least three administrative geniuses—Gideon Welles under Lincoln, Josephus Daniels under Wilson, Frank Knox during World War II. And it has always, always burned with fierce pride in its traditions, in *being ready*, in its long history of independent command. Those little bumper stickers shouting NAVY are not there for the fun of it; behind them lies a whole culture, families with four generations' service, the camaraderie of deadly combat and dead-serious train-

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ing for it, in which *duty* and *honor* are common words. If you doubt that, you have only to attend a Navy League dinner or visit the archives of BUSHIPS (the Navy's Bureau of Ships), where scale models of frigates, cruisers, riverboats, and dreadnoughts—each vessel ever commissioned by the U.S. Navy—sail proudly toward eternity like a Pharaoh's funerary display, a ghost fleet whose real-world counterparts have long since vanished, still cruising the back of the Navy's collective mind.

Now SECNAV is neither Cabinet member nor commander. Command flows from the President through the Joint Chiefs to the so-called theater admirals, and the position is an "administrative billet" charged with budget, procurement, and manpower needs. But the main job is what it has always been: to guard the door between the world and the uniform like a two-headed Janus, translating civilian priorities to the Navy and the admirals' case to civilian spheres. It is "a curious, in-between position," says one former occupant. "You're outside the loop for military, foreign affairs, and arms control, but you've got a lot of power to help shape the Navy and Marine Corps if you want to be active. If you want to lay back, you can do that, too. There are basically two kinds of service secretaries—political hacks, or stars too good for the job." The good ones, he adds, are good at "duality management, working out accommodations, being a broker between the military and civilian sides. But the job is basically what you make it." Lehman himself has said that many "Secretary jobs have been ways to take care of a deserving chap rather than get the best man," and the record bears this out. "Secretary of the Navy?" Richard Nixon once remarked, "Hell, anyone can do that job. We've had John Warner in it." There is "no formula for the office, no way of training for it," intones its official *History*. One acquaintance of the first nominee put it more succinctly. "I have seen Mr. Stoddert of Georgetown," he wrote in 1798. "But I cannot believe he will accept. He appeared to be a man of good sense."

YET, IF anyone has trained for the office, John Lehman has. He comes from the culture, and each step of his career seems to have pointed to the job. To understand that, you should walk down

Easton Road in Glenside, Pa., past Wesley's Hardware and the Reading Station, up Mt. Carmel to Roslyn Avenue. The white frame house with green shutters and porches, toward the end of the block, is where Lehman grew up and his parents still live, 10 minutes from Willow Grove Naval Air Station. It is the kind of house that has nooks, bays, attics, and the constant door-slams of boys returning from schools and sports. Though the neighborhood is a Philadelphia suburb, you can find the same tidy, mapled street—solid, self-contained, small-town, comfortably traditional—in Scranton or Iowa. And though three Lehmans—John; Joe, 36 ('69 C), a deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (A.C.D.A.); Chris, 34, director of the Office of Strategic Nuclear Policy at the State Department—are now in Washington, the Lehman mobility seems more upward than geographic. They stick to their roots and their lasts.

The family were "lace-curtain Irish," according to one Jesuit observer. "They made it early and believe Catholics have to be better Americans than anyone else." Lehman's great-grandfather was a Naval ship's surgeon during the Civil War. His grandmother was John B. Kelly's sister. Grace Kelly was a flower girl at his parents' wedding. His father, an industrial-plant manager, also skippered an amphibious gunboat at Okinawa, an experience vividly transmitted to his children. "He saw fighting and dying at close hand," says son Joe. "Even now, in happy situations, he'll lean back and say, 'Peace, it's wonderful,' in a voice that sends shivers down your back." The kids were told to "hit the deck" instead of wake up, and "square it away" if their rooms were a mess. "We all grew up with the fascination of things military, especially Navy," Joe recalls.

Other things also came with the chromosomes: rowing, conservative politics, a breezy self-confidence, a determination to excel. All the Lehman boys went to Catholic schools, rowed for the Vesper Boat Club, helped put themselves through college, signed up for Navy or N.R.O.T.C. training, got involved early in arms-control issues, took degrees which emphasized security and defense. The framework was clear from the beginning, several Lehmans agree: fierce family loyalty, an obligation "not to do anything that would harm the family name"; accountability that made "excuses not worth much"; a demand for

athletic and academic achievement in which "you competed against yourself, not against each other."

It is a big, energetic, close-knit, close-mouthed clan, reminiscent of the Kennedys, down to its upbeat, iron-willed patriarch. "Except," chuckles Joe, "that we spend summers at Ocean City, New Jersey, not Hyannis. . . . And we're Republicans."

"They hang together, they work together, they help each other politically," says a Pentagon official. "It's like having another power base." "It is another power base," growls a Hill critic. "Some days you look around and everyone up here feels like they're named Lehman."

In this feisty family, John, Jr., moving fast, formed the mold. He "hasn't changed in any essentials since he was a kid," says Joe. "He's always been energetic, interested in military-political affairs, a take-charge person who sets goals and achieves them." Under the influence of the Kellys—notably John B., Jr., '50 C, a first cousin and friend—Lehman started rowing at La Salle High School and continued through Vesper and St. Joseph's College, where he worked in the student wing of the Goldwater campaign, helped organize an arms-control conference focused on what to do when the Russians can't be trusted, enlisted in Air Force R.O.T.C., aiming for a Naval Air commission after graduating with honors in international relations.

In 1963, by "hard work and hard rowing," he won the U.S. Intermediate Double Sculls Championship, pulling away while the family cheered from the banks of the Schuylkill River. "To tell the truth, I don't remember that exact race," says his mother. "I cheered my boys on at so many of them. . . . I'm still cheering." In the first of a series of mixed blessings, he also won an Earhart fellowship to Caius (pronounced "keys") College at Cambridge University that forced him to decline his commission. "I always wanted to be a pilot," he says dryly. "But I kept getting these damn scholarships instead."

Two incidents stand out from those early years. The first was Lehman's clenched-jawed determination to win in single and double sculls, despite his 5'9" height disadvantage. The second was a dramatic rescue. In 1959, a car careened off the East River Drive into the Schuylkill. Without hesitating, Lehman and two other high school crew members



U.S. NAVY PHOTO

Secretary Lehman visits the new nuclear submarine 'San Francisco.'

dove out of their practice shell, pulled the stunned driver from his sinking vehicle, and swam him to shore. They were written up in the Philadelphia papers and given awards, but "that's not the important thing," says a brother. "The important thing is John never talked about it afterwards."

At Cambridge from 1965 to 1967, Lehman took honors degrees in international law and diplomacy, stroked the college eight that won Henley, became the first American named "captain of boats" in over a century. He also transferred to the Air Force Reserve and drilled for two years at Lakenheath Royal Air Force Base, just to be around planes. And he began a long series of personal friendships with admirals when Arleigh Burke read the proceedings of that early arms-control conference, contacted their editor, and urged him—somewhat superfluously—to seek a commission in the Naval Reserve.

Lehman's collision with Cambridge's 800-year traditions seems to have left a permanent mark, in both language and the college ties he wears. He still calls men "chaps" and Englishmen "Brits," (as in "During the Falklands, the Brits wasted 40 missiles shooting at whales. Yet the systems analysts will tell you because the kill rate is 0.55, you only need—100. That's how systems analysts fight wars.") But like his Oxbridge debating style, which aims to destroy rather than defeat opponents, these traits are not mannerisms. They are cemented in.

The Navy commission and a Penn doctoral fellowship in international relations came through together, forcing another choice. With characteristic energy, Lehman picked both, installing

himself at Strausz-Hupé's Foreign Policy Research Institute (F.P.R.I.) while returning to Glenside for preliminary flight training at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. Henry Kissinger and Richard Allen were both active at F.P.R.I., then emerging as a center of conservative opposition to "appeasement" in Vietnam. Lehman—his initial dissertation on the Irish Republican Army stalled because "my sources dried up"—soon enlisted in those 1968 battles as a foreign affairs specialist for Nixon campaign adviser Allen. In January of 1969, Allen appointed him to the staff of the White House National Security Council (N.S.C.), beginning what he jokingly calls a long period of "being hooked on the public trough."

WHEN THE irascible Allen left N.S.C. six months later, Kissinger named Lehman senior staff member and (later) special counsel. Though only 27 years old when foreign-affairs power was being withdrawn from the State Department to the Nixon White House, Lehman became a key squadron commander in the Administration's increasingly paranoid battles with Congress over Vietnam and international security policy, charged with coordinating legislative strategy to support military and foreign aid, oversee arms control, defeat the Cooper-Church and Cambodia amendments, "limit the damage" from leaks of classified data out of Senator Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee—and unshackle the Navy to bring "peace with honor" to Vietnam.

In his final Penn dissertation, completed in 1974 after he left the White House, Lehman eventually concluded that paranoia was counterproductive and the Imperial President's foreign-affairs authority must be shared with Congress

to be effective. But that poisonous conflict poisoned him, too. In 1970-71, he privately called Fulbright and other Democratic leaders "mischievous" and "traitors" for tactics he saw undermining national security—remarks which got printed in a city that does not forget. And in 1972, after S.A.L.T. I and the fall elections, he reportedly orchestrated one of the purges to which the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency has periodically been subject for "trusting the Russians" too much.

"Look," Lehman will say now with a cold blue stare. "I was Kissinger's point man on the Hill. The legislative strategy was to confound Fulbright and the doves on Vietnam . . . and the President had a right to expect loyal Republicans. These were real grudge matches, bitter personally and ideologically."

"He carried the anti-war legislative role and did it well," notes a former N.S.C. colleague. "But it was always part cover. His other job was to keep an eye on the dangerous radicals Kissinger brought down from Harvard to the staff." He laughs. "I never really understood the role of political commissars in the Soviet Union in the Twenties till I worked with John at N.S.C. But the President had a legislative program and all of us were responsible for getting it passed as long as we worked there. And we all served at the President's pleasure."

"He was never really anybody's protégé," adds another former colleague. "He was more an independent actor, his own man."

Lehman stayed at N.S.C. until 1974, visiting Vietnam several times and flying guest sorties off aircraft carriers into the dangerous skies of the North. When the post-war effort wound down, he resigned to finish his dissertation and receive his Penn Ph.D. He also began triple-time training to get formal pilot's wings, but was sent by Kissinger to Vienna in July of 1974 as a delegate to the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks aimed at reducing American and Russian ground forces in Europe.

Six months later, President Ford nominated him to be deputy director of A.C.D.A. In a classic example of how the Washington maze curls back on itself, the nomination came before the same Foreign Relations Committee Lehman had battled over Vietnam, triggering what even one Democrat labels "a binge of left-wing McCarthyism." For five months and four hearings, Lehman and high-ranking Administration witnesses were called and recalled to testify, brutally cross-examined on footnotes in Lehman's dissertation, made to read back long passages like stenographers taking dictation, repeatedly invited to disavow their candidate. The hearings even raised academic freedom

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LEHMAN'S TOUGH, HEADY TALK REDUCES OPPONENTS TO ARGUMENTS ABOUT TACTICS RATHER THAN PREMISES.

issues when Penn law professor Covey Oliver, Lehman's thesis supervisor, wrote the committee to protest "the implications . . . of a nomination being held up by questions about the propriety of a degree granted by the qualified authorities at a major university or by members' disagreement with the conclusions reached by the scholar." Then-A.C.D.A. Director Fred Iklé praised Lehman's "enormous dedication, vigor, loyalty, and ability to cut through bureaucratic underbrush." Kissinger cabled support from Aswan.

The deadlock was ultimately broken by Democratic Senators Gale McGee and Hubert Humphrey, who had written the 1961 law creating A.C.D.A. "Whatever his views, the guy was terrifically well-qualified," says a former member of Humphrey's staff. "He'd spent practically his whole life on arms control and security. . . . Besides, he would give the agency more influence with the White House, which was why they wanted him."

On March 17, 1975, the committee reported the nomination by a vote of 9-6 to the full Senate, which confirmed it after another battle a month later. "They pulled out all the stops to undo me," Lehman drawls now, without rancor. "They even sent people to Penn to interview my faculty supervisors, but it backfired because everyone read the dissertation and loved it. Hell," he adds gleefully, "anybody who could get Symington, Church, McGovern, and Pell to vote against him has a badge of honor in this Administration—if he could get confirmed."

At the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Lehman finally found time to win his aviator wings and begin a celebrated series of carrier reserve flights, while focusing on nuclear proliferation to third-world countries like Libya and pursuing his belief in specific arms agreements rather than "general, complete disarmament." According to several sources, he also put the agency far enough to the right to isolate Kissinger and kill any S.A.L.T. II agreement for the rest of the Ford Administration. But as one Kissinger intimate notes, it was clear that Ford could not pursue another arms treaty with the Russians anyway, since "the Reagan challenge needed to be conciliated . . . and the President had to run immediately, both against his right wing and in the general election."

In January of 1977, Lehman was promptly turned out of office in the

quadrennial A.C.D.A. housecleaning. But unlike many defense experts, he neither returned to academe nor accepted an arms-company sinecure to wait out the exile years producing high-paid policy papers. Instead, he founded his own management-consulting firm, Abington Corporation, and built it into a thriving business which advised United States and overseas corporations on defense-technology trends and marketing strategies. Using Abington as a base, he also chaired the defense advisory group of the Republican National Committee, helped staff Nitze's influential Committee on the Present Danger, served as vice president of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and continued his opposition to S.A.L.T. II. When the Reagan landslide swept the Republicans back to power in the White House and the Senate, Lehman—a principal architect of the candidate's defense and foreign-policy platforms—was ready.

"I told the President-elect," he says, "that there was only one job I would leave private life to come in for—this one." Why Navy? "Because my father skippered that ship *right there*," he barks, jabbing across his office to a table-length model of Lehman Sr.'s LCS-18. "Because I felt the U.S. took a historically wrong course in the tremendous downgrading of the Navy after 1970, and the Carter Administration made such a hard downturn. I felt I knew how to strengthen it, especially on the Hill, and bureaucratically, knew how to work the system to make it cough up the changes, turn that around."

Lehman's main rival was an amiable Cadillac dealer from Thousand Oaks, Calif., with friends in the Reagan kitchen cabinet. But it was like a Cadillac racing a Maserati: Lehman put his conservative network in gear, and the Cadillac dealer limped off to become Ambassador to Australia.

The day after the inauguration, President Reagan sent up Lehman's nomination with those of other Cabinet members. It came before the Senate Armed Services Committee, which had opposed Foreign Relations' Vietnam-era incursions into the security field. In a dramatic turnaround, which reflected these rivalries, as well as shifts in the Senate and in the country's mood, the nomination was whisked through by acclamation at Lehman's first hearing and confirmed the next morning without a dissenting vote.

FROM THE big windows of John Lehman's Pentagon office, you look across the Potomac to the National Cathedral on its heights. The juxtaposition fits.

For thousands of years, the social fabric has rested on the leader-king who embodied the state, the priest who assured its spiritual continuity, and the warrior who preserved it on the material plane. America paid the myth homage by making its President Commander-in-Chief and sending a dozen generals to the White House. That bond was badly fractured by Southeast Asia and Watergate—events which led much of a generation to fight from its churches, mistrust and besiege its leaders, make pariahs of Vietnam veterans, regard the military as a machine out of control. But now, a new generation is rising. R.O.T.C. has returned to the campus in force, and hundreds of thousands of high school students drill each week in Junior R.O.T.C. The recent opening of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—whose visual effect photographer David Douglas Duncan compares to "the shock of a mass grave"—produced a spontaneous outpouring of emotion, a thousand tearful embraces between vets and civilians, a legitimization of simple human suffering. And if it is true that, in politics as in love-making, timing is everything, then John Lehman is the Don Juan of defense—alert, aggressive, riding the crest.

"This is the finest job in the world," he tells anyone who will listen. "The real problem has been that the average tenure for service secretaries is 26 months, and McNamara's Whiz Kids reduced many of them to ceremonial figureheads who let the admirals do the work. We've changed that . . . and we know that we must: *First*, get the best people . . . *Second*, get a shipbuilding and aircraft program that will more than compensate for attrition and obsolescence . . . *Third*, telescope research and development so technology can reach the fleet in a shorter time. Though some blue-suiters may not like it, they'd rather have me with all my warts than the old way. The issues are really quite simple."

But John Lehman is not simple and cannot be stereotyped. His goal remains Themistocles's: the ability to win where fight may be needed, "from interference with freedom of the seas by small nations, to full-scale war at sea by a superpower." But he, too, has been through Vietnam and Watergate. He knows that

bishops can still oppose deployments, and he has learned that the goal must be advanced through short-term justifications—precise, concrete, persuasive—not by ideology or belief. To charges by former Defense Secretaries that “the Navy is going wild” with expanded commitments, he replies that there is “no built-in thrust for a bigger Navy,” that Congress has created the commitments through treaties with over 40 nations and a 600-ship fleet is the minimum needed to protect them.

He will note that naval supremacy “is not a strategy, it’s a precondition to any strategy” because neither the United States nor its allies can survive without open seas. He will point out that we can no longer “swing” forces from the Pacific to Europe because the Russians now operate a 130-ship Pacific fleet out of Cam Ranh Bay, and “no one would stand for abandoning Malaysia, the Persian Gulf, Japan, or Hawaii.” He will remind you that “there have been 300 instances since World War II when the President has had to deploy carrier battle groups” and that “historically, whenever a crisis breaks out anywhere in the world, Presidents have found that the only really powerful tools available to them on short notice . . . are the Navy

John Lehman is the first Navy chief to hold two pairs of flight wings.



BILL JONES

and Marines.” He will say, “There’s no such thing as a free launch”—and explain why building two carriers together saves almost \$1 billion over the cost of building them separately. He will explain that naval supremacy, unlike nuclear superiority, will not create an arms race because 600 ships are enough “no matter how much the Soviets build.” And he makes brilliant use of what rhetoric teachers used to call the “dazzling fact” which changes the terms of discourse—the assertion, for instance, that the Soviets “are everywhere, even in among the guys fishing blues off Norfolk,” or that the new Cuban Navy can bottle up the Gulf ports from which must come 85% of U.S. materiel for any sustained conflict.

It is tough, heady talk which tends to reduce opponents to arguments about tactics rather than premises. Lehman has used it to add to the Navy’s traditional roles of protecting commerce, rapid deployment, and nuclear deterrence, a fourth mission, *horizontal escalation*: the doctrine that Soviet land supremacy in Europe and the Middle East may be contained by American maritime ability to hit Russia or her allies elsewhere at the same time, by choice. And he has made it his job to project not just power, but consensus—to recreate the bipartisan defense policy that lasted for over 20 post-War years.

Consensus and public support for defense are constant themes in Lehman’s speeches, often coupled with statements that the Reagan defense budget consumes a lower percentage of G.N.P. than Kennedy’s or Eisenhower’s. And in a recent article, he attempted to disembowel assertions that the “defense consensus” had eroded, arguing the logic of “invest[ing] now to make certain that we do not face in the future the deficiencies . . . that disturb us in the present” and attacking “the convenient beliefs, surfacing once again, that . . . the signal of a serious program is a substitute for carrying it out.” It is classic warrior-talk, keen-edged and impatient with bureaucracy as Caesar in Gaul or Patton in Normandy, with one eye fixed on the mission and the other on the means to finish it fast.

THE YEAR 1982 closed well for John Lehman. He was charged with—and vigorously denied—failing to sever financial ties with Abington Corporation. But pressure for defense cuts still lay in the future, and he was beginning to be mentioned as a future Secretary of Defense or even Presidential candidate. For the first time in memory, no major contract claims were pending against the Navy. Thanksgiving weekend, the entire Lehman clan, including his wife, the former Barbara Wieland, and their two children,

John F., III, 4, and Alexandra, 6, reunited in Philadelphia to celebrate the tricentennial of the first “Lehman” in America, one Philip Lehmann, who arrived with William Penn. On December 17, the lame-duck Congress delivered Lehman the lion’s share of the 1983 defense budget and confirmed his second carrier by a Senate vote of 69-31—“the kind of defense erosion I like to see,” he said, pointing out that the opposition had slipped six votes. Thirty members and three generations of Lehmans gathered in Washington for Christmas and, among other things, presented their patriarch with copies of the original Okinawa dispatches describing his 1944 tangle with Kamikazes. On December 27, Lehman signed the \$3.1 billion notice to start two new supercarriers, noting that his Navy had saved five shipyards from bankruptcy. The next day, he heard President Reagan recommission the battleship *New Jersey* and confirm the Lehman doctrine of maritime superiority by condemning “unilateral disarmament” and declaring that “open seas are the lifeblood of a free nation . . . the price of peace is never cheap.” One of the few dissents registered was a sign, carried by a demonstrator, which read: “Let them eat battleships.”

These economic times are not Eisenhower’s, and it is too soon to tell whether the defense surge will boomerang or how Lehman would do with a shrinking rather than an expanding pie. Two former Defense Secretaries recently attacked Lehman for creating a “rollercoaster” that will produce “a helluva big cut” for lack of popular support. Another suggested that horizontal escalation is a shell game because there is no target the Navy could hit that means more to the Russians than the Persian Gulf means to the United States. Like a Wagnerian chorus, other critics are rising, right and left. “Hell,” says one of Lehman’s brothers, “as my old crew coach once told me, every time you get your head above the crowd, some sonofabitch’ll throw a rock at it.”

But if you want to know how John Lehman is doing right now, you have only to ask around the Pentagon. “I’ll tell you what’s wrong with Lehman,” snaps an Air Force official. “He’s so goddam young, and so goddam good.” It is the ultimate accolade: in the world’s largest brickyard, he has not yet been hit.

“John was always so ambitious,” says his mother proudly, adding with unintended irony, “He deserves everything he gets.” But the Secretary himself disclaims further ambition. “I’m happy as a clam doing what I’m doing,” he grins. “When I came, I said I would stay a minimum of four years for continuity. I wouldn’t mind being here 28 years . . . like Gorshkov.”

END