MR. FACTS TAKES WASHINGTON

Out of the West (by way of Harvard and Detroit) came Robert S. McNamara, a thinking man who packs a fast computer—and the Pentagon hasn't been the same since

By CURTIS MITCHELL

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS after John F. Kennedy, 43, was elected President of the United States, a relatively unknown young man, Robert Strange McNamara, 44, was elected to the presidency of the Ford Motor Co. They had never met.

Five weeks later, Kennedy offered the high-salaried (more than $500,000 a year) McNamara a $25,000 job as Secretary of Defense, a post which its first occupant, James V. Forrestal, called "a cemetery for dead cats." McNamara thought about it for seven days; then he accepted, amid the misgivings of critics who preferred a "name" for the job.

Now, more than a year and a half later, the moon-faced young man in the gold-rimmed glasses has become a world figure and the recipient of widespread acclaim.

"McNamara is the most outstanding Secretary of Defense ever to hold that office—he is unique," says Rep. Carl Vinson, chairman of the House Armed Forces Committee.

"He is an IBM machine on legs," says Sen. Barry Goldwater.

The public is pleased by such praise—but it also is a little perplexed. Can McNamara be *that* good? In looking for the answer, first consider the size of his job.

McNamara runs an establishment that spends more than $48 billion each year, more than the combined national budgets of Great Britain, France, West Germany, and Italy. He is "the boss" of 2½ million servicemen and one million civilian employees of the Defense Department.

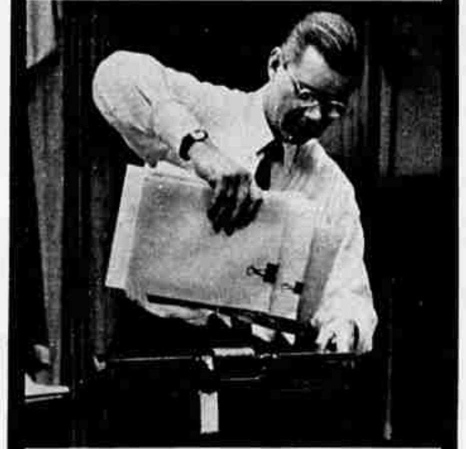
Second, consider the unusual way he meets the problems of this huge establishment.

As soon as he took office, McNamara was faced with such major questions as: Should we cancel the atomic plane? Add more Polaris subs? Junk our aircraft carriers? Abolish the National Guard? True to his already-established form, he broke the problems down into 131 categories and ordered task-force studies.

When the task forces reported, McNamara and his aides ran the findings through Pentagon computers and began to take action. They decided that the most pressing need was to build up U. S. deterrent power to a point where it would protect us against any surprise attack. Despite the ensuing eruption in the Pentagon, which has been described as "bone-shaking," McNamara pressed toward his goal.

One thing about McNamara, he *likes* to make decisions. He detests inaction. Years ago, he vowed he would attend to every personal decision within seven days, and he has done so.

McNamara dazzles colleagues with his capacity for absorbing and retaining facts.



The Defense chief calls it a day. He's up at 6:45, puts in 12-18 hours on job.

With Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of joint chiefs of staff, he maps strategy.

Old-fashioned sincerity seems to guide his every action. When he was called in to talk to President-elect Kennedy in 1960, he knew he was being judged for a high position. But he felt that he, too, had to make a judgment. He had read JFK's book, "Profiles in Courage," and he was impressed. But he also had heard rumors that the book was "ghosted" by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. So McNamara bluntly asked Mr. Kennedy: "Sir, did you write the book yourself?"

The President-elect explained that he had been helped with the research but that "the writing is my own!" From that day on, the two men were on the same wave length.

McNamara's old friends are not surprised that such a neophyte in politics walks so confidently through the booby traps of Washington. His exceptional intelligence and executive ability help him in this regard. But another important factor is his private life, which is anchored to the solid foundation of his family—his wife Margaret, their daughters Margaret Elizabeth, 20, and Kathleen, 17, and their son Robert Craig, 11.

A Program of Togetherness

The McNamaras spend summer vacations camping together and winter holidays skiing together. Between times, they climb mountains —together, of course.

At home, they read books by the score. It was by choice, not chance, that McNamara and his family lived in Ann Arbor, Mich., a university town, rather than fashionable Grosse Pointe, when he was with Ford.

In Washington, the McNamara home is a Spanish-accented house with five bedrooms and baths. The day begins for the Secretary of Defense when his alarm rings at 6:45. He rises easily, even eagerly. Nowadays, he skips calisthenics, except when he is toughening himself for a ski tour or for mountaineering. As often as possible, he sits down to a family breakfast. The talk usually is about books or sports.

After skimming the news off the New York *Times*, McNamara dashes out to the chauffeured government Cadillac waiting at the curb.

He begins each workday by performing a unique drill. He thinks. Thinking is a labor for which he requires silence. In Detroit, he kept the first 90 minutes of each morning inviolate, and he tries to do the same now.

During his thinking period, McNamara sits and stares or paces restlessly or probes through pages of facts which, in his lexicon, are the tools for solving an organization's problems. Thousands of such facts are compressed into a personal library of thick, black books marked SECRET, which lie on his desk most workdays.

The target of many McNamara "quiet hours" is the 550 points into which he originally divided the Defense Department's spending activities. His mastery of these facts enables him to put on such remarkable performances as his appearance before a Congressional committee last year. He had been asked to amplify his request for naval funds. And he did so—by throwing 240 typewritten pages at the Congressmen and talking for 11 straight days. During that time, he named the cost and mission of every ship in the program.

"He left us exhausted, dazzled, and satiated," a tired witness recalls.

McNamara's fact-backed personality creates an effect all the more devastating because it surprises people. His physique is lean but unimpressive. His hair is slicked back and parted in the fashion of 30 years ago. As one Congressman said: "McNamara looks like a small-town insurance agent."

But action transforms him. Walking, he lopes. Standing, he shuffles and teeters. At a conference table, he crouches to make a point, his smallish face turning mobile and dramatic as figures pour from his brain. He listens, too—jotting endless notes with his left hand.

But McNamara is not all push, push, push!

At times, he will excuse himself, jump into his personal car (a Ford), and drive to a grassy field at Sidwell Friends School, where for an hour he is the proud father whose love and support are needed by a young athlete named Bob.

Night life for McNamara usually means work (he devotes 12 to 18 hours a day to his job), but he sometimes gets a chance to cut loose. Last winter, he attended a private party at the White House and danced till 4:30 a.m. Insiders report that the best twisting of the evening took place when the Secretary of Defense danced with the First Lady.

Go East, Young Man

The McNamara story began in California, where Robert's Irish father settled down and married a Scotch-English lass, Clara Nell Strange. Bob was a precocious boy. He could read like a 13-year-old when he entered first grade. At the University of California, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his sophomore year. Summers, the independent-minded youth shipped out on freighters to the Orient.

After the University of California, McNamara moved east to Harvard, where he won a master's degree with one of the highest academic records in the history of the School of Business Administration. In Cambridge, the young Westerner became immersed in the principles of statistical control that were then beginning to change the face of industry. He absorbed the new methods enthusiastically.

Harvard offered McNamara an assistant professorship in 1940—and with it a degree of financial security that made marriage possible. So he put in a telephone call to Margaret Craig, an attractive brunette he had met in his undergraduate days. She wasn't at her home in California, but he finally reached her at a Y.W.C.A. in Baltimore. Margaret accepted his proposal from a telephone booth.

"I've always wanted to go to Baltimore and see that booth," McNamara mused recently.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, he was turned down for military service because of nearsightedness. But after a time, the Air Force waived his visual handicap and made him a captain, then a major, and—at 28—a lieutenant colonel.

After the war, he was preparing to return to his teaching job when an Air Force colonel got an idea that changed the course of his life. The colonel put the talents of McNamara and nine other young Air Force statisticians into one package and offered them "for sale" to American industrial firms. Somebody snidely dubbed them the Whiz Kids, but a number of companies showed serious interest. Of these, Ford made the best offer. So the McNamaras moved to Detroit, and the academic world lost a professor.

McNamara gave up top Ford post to join cabinet. Here he meets with President.

In South Vietnam, the Secretary inspects local troops with Col. Nugyen Quoc Hoang.

Bob McNamara isn't all work. He and wife Margaret attend a formal ball in capital.

At the time, Ford was afflicted with growing pains and a multitude of other problems which the Whiz Kids attacked with zest. After only three years, McNamara became company controller. Soon he was influencing decisions about production and fighting for safety belts and the 12,000-mile guarantee. He gave the already-successful Thunderbird two moreseats—and tripled its sales. He moved the compact Falcon into production—and saw it get off to a fast start, outstripping all competition in its class.

In 1960, he reached Ford's peacock throne, the presidency. Five weeks later, he was called to Washington.

Brickbats Amid the Plaudits

Today the majority opinion in Washington seems to be that McNamara has proved himself a brilliant, dedicated, and incorruptible public servant. Walter Lippmann, the distinguished newspaper columnist, summed up this attitude recently when he said: "McNamara is the ablest man ever to come to the Pentagon."

But there is a minority opinion, too, expressed for the most part by disgruntled members of the military hierarchy.

One high officer worries about his haste in "running everything through the computer." Noting that the machine's findings are right only when it is fed relevant information, he adds: "I don't think he asks the right questions."

Another official, whose memory encompasses earlier Secretaries of Defense, says: "I sure wish we had those dumb guys back."

The McNamara weakness, if it is a weakness, is that he is a loner. In backslapping Washington, this is often a good way to win enemies and antagonize people.

The McNamara strength is that he is a man of thought dedicated to action. "I see my position as being that of a leader, not a judge," he says. "I'm here to originate and stimulate new ideas and programs—using deliberate analysis to force alternative programs to the surface and then making explicit choices among them."

As a result of McNamara's efforts, we are well on our way toward a formidable atomic submarine fleet, a widely dispersed underground missile complex, and a vastly expanded troop air-transport system. He feels we are no longer outgunned and that our strength has become a powerful deterrent to any but an insane enemy. He says:

"We are strong enough militarily to survive any atomic attack, to strike back and completely destroy the enemy, and to withstand whatever blackmail threats a second power might make."

Listening, the free world rests a little easier, for it knows that in Moscow and Peiping they, too, can hear the music of McNamara's band.