

GEN. CURTIS LeMAY— “Old Iron Pants” Holds the Fort

By CURTIS MITCHELL



The curtness of the Air Force chief of staff enrages many officials, but all Americans sleep easier because this dedicated general is on the job



Gen. LeMay and his wife Helen enjoy the large patio behind their home at Fort Myer, Virginia.

Allied ground generals wanted to drive a tank column down the railroad track to Berlin. But LeMay conceived the notion of “winged freighters,” argued for it, and won. The result was the Berlin airlift, and the lead pilot of the first plane to run the gauntlet was “Old Iron Pants.”

Given command of all Uncle Sam's bombers, he expanded the Strategic Air Force from 600 to 3,000 atom-bomb carriers. Blunt and curt, he got results, but many of his superiors said he was too prickly for the give-and-take of supreme command. Yet, he was made Deputy Chief of Staff and then, in 1961, he became top man of the entire Air Force.

Today, he still holds that job. To many, this is a small miracle because he and Secretary of Defense McNamara are often at odds. When the Administration's test-ban treaty came before the Senate a few weeks ago, all the Chiefs of Staff testified that they were backing it—but only LeMay let it be known that, if the treaty hadn't already been signed, he probably would have opposed it. In any administration—but particularly in one where team play is emphasized—such recalcitrance does not go over too well.

But winning or losing, LeMay is still in the thick of every defense decision, except when he withdraws to his home and his hobbies.

Another Kind of Perfectionist

Quarters Seven at Fort Myer, across the river from Washington, D.C., is the LeMay domicile. It is a far cry from the crowded house in Columbus, Ohio, where he was born and lived with five sisters and brothers, his gentle mother, and his French-Canadian father. Quarters Seven, one of a row of brick residences, is unique in at least two respects: it is surrounded by a beautiful garden, and its mistress is Helen LeMay.

Helen Maitland LeMay, who married the young pilot in 1934, is blonde, charming, talented, energetic, and a full partner in their busy home life. “When we learned we had to move here,” she says, “I planted two gardens at the old house, one to stay and one to move. When the time came, I brought along my ‘moving’ bulbs.” You enter the house under a canopy of roses. “Floribunda that bloom all summer,” she explains. “I've moved them from one house to another four times.”

The extensive beds of manicured irises and miniature marigolds create an impression of many servants. But Helen LeMay sets a visitor

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