

straight. "I'm the only one allowed to touch this garden. Usually I'm up weeding at 6:30." An immense patio of weathered brick covers half the back yard. "The lawn was worn out, so we went down to the dump and fished out 4,000 old bricks and carted them up here in the family car."

Inside the LeMay home, you sense rather than see that they are a closely knit team. Paintings he has collected and others she has painted decorate the walls. You sense it in her golden bracelet with its bangles of airplane models and as you overhear her respond to endless phone calls about the Air Force charity group she directs.

The LeMays' immense living room has become the core of their home life. One wall is mostly a window looking over shrubbed slopes to a hazy District of Columbia. A taupe rug ties together chairs and a sofa drawn around a coffee table before a deep fireplace. Two consoles stand as high as a man's chest, embracing a meticulously engineered stereophonic system. Curt LeMay built it, cabineted it, and laid on the glossy patina.

Other LeMay artifacts include two "tweeter" cabinets hung overhead behind the valance, still unpainted, and the modified breakfast in an adjacent study that Helen designed in a frenzy of determination to contain the sprawling empire of wires and record players, wires and hi-fi tuners, wires and tape recorders.

Hobbyists at Work

His workshop is in the basement. When time permits, he retires there to fashion some gadget. At the same hour, Helen is probably up under the eaves in a studio where she follows her great enthusiasm, painting. Many of her oils decorate the homes of friends, including that of Madame Chiang Kai-shek on Formosa.

This is their first home without a room for Janie, their only child. Two years ago, their daughter married a service physician, and they now live at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. But on a small table by the big chair in which the General sits you will find a well-thumbed album of family photographs.

"We are a close family," Mrs. LeMay reminds you.

Day begins in this home much as it does for any suburban husband. His bed is king-size, which is his idea. The bathroom is carpeted wall-to-wall, which is her idea. He takes 11 minutes to exercise, showers, and goes downstairs to his one-egg breakfast. "If I'm down first, I hand him the paper without a word," Mrs. LeMay says. "He's the kind of person who can't talk before 10 o'clock."

Breakfast over, the pattern changes when a military limousine picks him up and delivers him to the Pentagon. In the basement garage there, he uses a special key to a private elevator. Pressing the down button would take him to the bombproof command post, which is always in readiness. He presses the up button.

In his office, he swings from briefings to conferences to interviews. Hour after

hour, this caged man of action is required to make policy, set things right, answer inquiring Congressmen and newsmen.

Some time ago, a caller asked, "What about this balance of terror?"

He said, "I don't know of any balance of terror. I'm not terrified. My friends aren't terrified."

After the B-70 bomber was cancelled, a reporter asked, "Aren't you discouraged?"

He replied, "The B-17 was scrubbed three times before World War II. General Marshall got it fired up again. The B-52 was dead four times before we finally got it. I'm not discouraged."

After the Soviet rendezvous in space, an editor said, "They're doing better than we are, General. What have they got that we ought to worry about?"

LeMay answered, "I don't worry."

The Gathering in "the Tank"

On Monday afternoon at 2:30, he attends a meeting of the Joint Chiefs in a second-floor chamber called "the Tank." Secretary McNamara sits on his right. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, top man among the chiefs, sits on his left. LeMay unbuttons his blouse and waits.

Theodore White writes, "If LeMay is Mr. Massive Retaliation, Taylor is Mr. Flexible Response. He and LeMay are rivals, as they have always been. Only respect for each other's achievements keeps them this side of outright clash."

These officers are the cream of our military leadership. A friend says, "I think Curt is still startled to be sitting there with the top dogs." Insiders are surprised, too. At appointment time last spring, President Kennedy backed General Taylor with a two-year appointment, replaced a recalcitrant admiral, and named LeMay for only one more year. Nobody is certain what it means.

Being human, Curtis LeMay must wonder, too. But the odds are 1,000 to 1 that he will continue to assert that a man is more important than a machine, that the United States will need manned bombers for a long time to come, and that the Air Force must soon carry defensive explorations into outer space or we will become a second-class power.

He runs his shop on a single, unforgiving principle. "I'll back you in your first mistake," he tells subordinates. "If you make it again, you're through."

Pentagon politicians ask if his first mistake was to fight Secretary McNamara and his famous computers over the B-70 manned-bomber system. Nobody knows. But this much is certain: the first line of America's defense is still securely in the hands of its most experienced, battle-tested, space-oriented general.

"I like computers. I use 'em," says Curt LeMay. "But we still don't have one that's dedicated to this country or that's willing to die for liberty."

To a good many Congressmen and other citizens who like the cut of his homely jib, "Old Iron Pants" LeMay is the kind of chief America still needs.

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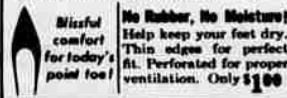
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