

In Memoriam: Stanley R. Resor (1917-2012)

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Stanley Rogers Resor, who served as a soldier, lawyer, secretary of the Army, arms control negotiator, and chairman of the Arms Control Association (ACA) Board of Directors, died April 17 at his home in Washington, D.C., at the age of 94. Stan touched the lives of many over the course of his long and illustrious career.

Resor was raised in New York and Connecticut by his parents, Stanley B. and Helen L. Resor, who were both prominent advertising executives. Stan, however, chose to become a lawyer.

His law career was put on hold, however, while he served as an officer in the Army's 10th Armored Division, which saw action in Europe and was engaged in the Battle of the Bulge and siege of Bastogne, where Resor was wounded. Among other honors, Resor was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart.

After the war, Resor rejoined Jane Pillsbury, whom he had married in 1942. They raised seven sons in New Canaan, Connecticut, and Washington. Jane died in 1994.

After receiving his law degree from Yale in 1946, Resor joined the New York law firm of Debevoise and Plimpton. In March 1965, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Resor undersecretary of the Army; later that year, he was named secretary of the Army. He remained in that post under President Richard Nixon, until June 1971.

As Army secretary, Resor was primarily responsible for the soldiers' welfare and the challenges of the growing force during the escalation of the U.S. war in Vietnam. He helped develop a plan for replacing draftees with an all-volunteer Army by 1973, although he expressed concern that it could lead the United States into more wars. In 1970, Resor was the first service chief to promote female officers to the general officer rank. In 1971 he moved to end discrimination against African-American soldiers in off-base housing.

Resor did not always see eye-to-eye with his superiors on the conduct of the war in Vietnam. Following the massacre of nearly 500 unarmed civilians at My Lai on March 16, 1968, Resor ordered an investigation and pursued the prosecution of dozens of U.S. soldiers involved. Over Resor's protests, Nixon succeeded in persuading the CIA to refuse to allow its agents to testify as witnesses, and key congressional leaders denied the prosecution access to the testimony of other key witnesses by putting it under security classification. This forced the Army to drop the charges for all but Lt. William Calley, who was found guilty but was pardoned in 1974.

A few weeks before his resignation on May 23, 1971, Resor expressed doubts about the war in Vietnam in an interview with reporters. He said, "I think it is clear now in hindsight that the cost[s] of Vietnam...were not anticipated, or at least were underestimated. We have learned as we've gone. We came to a much more mature recognition that...not just military power but a strategy involving economic and political measures was necessary."

In 1971, Resor resumed his law practice, but was soon called upon to lead negotiations with the Soviets on conventional arms reductions in Europe. From 1973 to 1978, he served with the rank of ambassador to the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks in Vienna.

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NATO's initial proposals called for phased removal of soldiers with a limit of 700,000 ground forces and 200,000 air forces combined. The Warsaw Pact countered that the two sides should reduce troop levels proportionally rather than to an equal level and that military equipment, including nuclear-capable aircraft, should also be reduced. Progress stalled over estimates of Warsaw Pact forces and the decision in 1979 to deploy U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe.

Although concrete limitations on forces were not achieved through the MBFR talks, which continued through the 1980s, the process deepened the East-West security dialogue and laid the groundwork for the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. Following his work on the MBFR talks, Resor served briefly as undersecretary of defense for policy under Harold Brown from 1978 to 1979.

In 1979, Resor rejoined Debevoise and Plimpton and became concerned about the worsening trajectory of U.S.-Soviet relations and the nuclear arms race. He joined the ACA board in 1983. Following his retirement from law practice, he served as ACA board chairman from 1992 to 2000 and was an outspoken advocate of verifiable, mutual nuclear arms reductions.

During his time on the board, Resor mentored dozens of ACA staff and oversaw the significant expansion of ACA's program and policy work. In 1997 he enlisted the support of 50 military and diplomatic experts for a joint letter to President Bill Clinton opposing the expansion of NATO as needlessly provocative to Russia. Over the past decade, he continued his lifelong interest in international security. He remained a steadfast friend of ACA and holds the unofficial record for best attendance at ACA events.

Resor is survived by his second wife, Louise Mead Walker—an arms control advocate in her own right—his sister Helen Hauge, his seven sons and seven daughters-in-law, 20 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

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