

## Tom Clancy's Books Put Bits and Pieces Together For the Patient Reader, Military Secrets Are Self-Revealing

WASHINGTON

**F**ROM the wealth of authentic detail in his best-selling novels about superpower brinkmanship, many people assume that Tom Clancy must have served in the armed forces.

In fact, he has no military experience. But he has been reading naval history since the fifth grade, he is fascinated with technology and he reads many specialized journals and reference books intended for engineers and military officers. And the way he has brought it all together in print is an illustration of the kind of synthesis, using only unclassified materials, that Government officials are increasingly concerned about.

Mr. Clancy, who minutely described sophisticated weaponry in such books as "The Hunt for Red October" and "Red Storm Rising," said that no one in the Government had given him "classified information of any kind." But he recalled that when he had lunch at the White House in 1985, John F. Lehman Jr., who was then Secretary of the Navy, asked him who had "cleared" the information in his first book, "Red October," about the hunt for a defecting Soviet submarine.

Mr. Lehman, in an interview last week, recalled telling Mr. Clancy in a good-natured way: "If you were a naval officer, I would have you court-martialed because of all the classified information in your book." Up to that time, Mr. Lehman said, "operational procedures of antisubmarine warfare had been classified." But, he added, Mr. Clancy had simply "pieced it all together by voraciously reading the open literature for 15 years, things like the Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute."

In the course of research for his books, Mr. Clancy also spent a week at sea on a Navy frigate, went aboard several submarines, interviewed intelligence officers, studied a \$10 war game and talked to a Soviet defector.

In an interview from his Maryland home, he acknowledged that there may be some validity to the Reagan Administration's concern. Using unclassified information, he said, it is sometimes possible to infer secrets about the "operational capabilities" of certain weapon systems such as the Stealth bomber. He calls this process "connecting the dots" because it links bits of information to form a big picture.

Nevertheless, it is, he said, unwise for the Government to try to restrict

access to unclassified information in the public domain. "One of the reasons we are so successful is that we have a free society with open access to information," he said. "If you change that, if you try to close off the channels of information, we'll end up just like the Russians, and their society does not work. The best way to turn America into another Russia is to emulate their methods of handling information."

Besides, he said, "the principle of deterrence depends on having the other guy know something about what we do. If everything we do is secret, they won't know enough to be afraid of us. Secrecy is a tool for national security, but like any tool it must be used intelligently."

Mr. Lehman agreed that "there should never be any kind of Government restraint on unclassified literature." He said that Mr. Clancy's accurate portrayal of undersea warfare had helped people understand the damage done by the Walker family spy ring, which sold Navy secrets to the Soviet Union, and by the Toshiba Corporation subsidiary that sold sensitive technology to the Russians, enabling them to make quieter submarines.

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