ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

LOS ANGELES TIMES
1 March 1987

Friends Recall Fired Aide

North Tended From Start to Go Too Far

By MAURA DOLAN and RICHARD E. MEYER, *Times Staff Writers*

WASHINGTON—Ollie never knows when to stop.

He is a striver. He turns tasks into challenges; his setbacks become obsessions. Ollie North drives himself to excess.

He is a charmer. His charm comes from charisma and confidence. But he can be calculating. By some accounts, there are times when Ollie North is manipulative.

He usually tells the truth. But sometimes the plain truth isn't enough. Other times he contaminates reality with disinformation. Some of what he says is curious; some is bizarre. Occasionally, Ollie North lies.

He is a prodigious doer, and he does each job exceptionally well. But he loses sight, from time to time, of the whole picture, particularly its political shadings.

Born in Texas

Oliver Laurence North, 43, was born in San Antonio, Tex. He grew up in Philmont, N.Y. He attended private and public schools, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, entered the Marine Corps, served in Vietnam, taught tactics and advanced to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was selected to work at the White House, on the staff of the National Security Council, in the Administration of President Reagan. He played a central role in the events that have created the President's most traumatic scandal. Reagan called him "a national hero." He also fired him.

There is little on the surface of North's life that tells how he came to play the role that will bring him back to center stage in the weeks to come, when special committees of Congress begin their nationally televised investigation into the Iran-*contra* affair.

In an initial appearance before Congress last December, North declined to answer questions, invoking his Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination. He declined a request by The Times for an interview. But discussions about North with his friends, his colleagues and his sister reveal a man whose personality made him a natural for the part he has played in this drama.

Whether he acted under direct orders or failed supervision, North is a man who was inclined from the very start to go too far.

□

Early on, he was expected to excel. The eldest of four children, he grew up in a home that stressed education and achievement. Neighbors in Philmont, a small blue-collar village, say everyone expected the North children to go to college. It was that kind of family.

North's parents assumed leadership roles in their community. Ann Clancy North, a tall woman who wore her prematurely gray hair with pride, was an outgoing, strong-willed mother. Neighbors say she taught occasionally as a substitute, served as a library trustee, participated in the PTA, collected for charities and volunteered at Sacred Heart, the family's parish church.

North was named Oliver after his father, Oliver Clay North. To prevent confusion, the son went by his middle name, Larry. Oliver Clay North was less gregarious than his wife but equally intense. He graduated from the prestigious Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, entered the Army, became a lieutenant colonel and earned a Silver Star for valor during World War II. But instead of pursuing a career in high finance or the military, he returned to Philmont after the war to help run the family wool-combing mill.

When Larry was in ninth grade, his parents put him in a Christian Bros. military academy that required a 3½-hour round-trip commute. When he returned to local public schools after a year, he worked so hard that teachers gave him extra credit for his effort.

"If he had an 89 average, you'd give him a 90," says history teacher Robert Bowes.

English teacher Thomas Gibbons recalls that North competed with everybody, particularly with his girlfriend, who at graduation was voted "class brain" and "most likely to succeed." Larry was voted "nicest looking" and "most courteous."

North won a scholarship to State University of New York, College at Brockport, Upstate, and considered becoming a teacher like his mother. But he also wanted the military life that had eluded his father. Instead of the Army, he selected the Marine Corps and participated in an officer-training program on campus.

Right Connections

He yearned to go to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., but it seemed out of reach until he met a fellow student with the right connections. The student's father was a coach at the academy and a neighbor of the academy's recruiting officer. North transferred to Annapolis after his sophomore year at state college.

There, as a freshman, he became known as Ollie, a variation of the name he shared with his father. That year, North also confronted his first serious setback. But he turned it into a challenge.

The setback was a car accident. The driver, a fellow student at the academy, was killed. Another passenger lay unconscious for three weeks. A third had to drop out of the academy because of his injuries. Ollie, who had been sleeping in the back seat, suffered knee and back injuries.

Continued

He took his challenge to St. Jude. "He would pass out St. Jude medals asking people to pray for him . . .," says Mike Bolier, an academy student who was in the hospital at the time with a shoulder injury. "He said St. Jude was for hopeless cases . . . and [he said], 'Say a few words for me and help me.'"

The injuries were severe. North had to leave the academy and return home to recuperate. Howard Rhodes, a neighbor, recalls North's self-prescribed regimen for getting himself back into shape: jumping off the garage roof.

Starting Over

To return to the academy the next year would mean starting over as a freshman. But that was just another challenge. Indeed, he became obsessed with proving that he could outdo his able-bodied peers. Classmates and teachers watched him warily, fearful that he would hurt himself again.

He walked with a limp but still played tackle football at the midshipmen's annual Turkey Bowl on Thanksgiving. During workouts, when everybody else did 50 push-ups, North did 60. If the rest of his classmates ran three miles, North ran five. When the other students ran the steps downstairs, North would run them upstairs. Boxing coach Emerson Smith said he would do all this in visible pain.

When his classmates took their vacations, North took Marine Corps training courses. He went to jump school one summer to qualify as a paratrooper. He spent another vacation studying survival tactics.

One spring night at the academy, after the lights were out, Midshipman Richard A. Petrino spotted North limping through Bancroft Hall. Petrino was the student brigade commander and on duty that night. He asked North what he was doing in the darkened corridor.

North, Petrino said, replied that he was trying to find his medical records. North said he wanted to remove a report about injuries from the car accident because he feared that they might keep him out of the Marines. Petrino, now 40, says he empathized and even admired North. Petrino did not report him.

In his junior year at the academy, North became a boxer.

"He had to struggle with that knee, but he never let on that he had that knee problem at all . . . ," Smith says. "He just did what he had to do while he was hurting. He was a mess."

North won five pre-tournament bouts and asked his coach whether he could box in the brigade open. Smith told him to get clearance from his doctor. North got it and began sparring. In the tournament, he would face James Webb, a formidable opponent. But in practice, North got decked by a much weaker boxer.

"Ollie," his coach told him, "as far as I'm concerned, you might as well stay out of the tournament."

North persisted. He went back to his doctor for clearance a second time, and the doctor advised that he could compete if he felt up to it. The coach relented. Smith said he felt that North needed "to prove something to himself."

North was a "Friday night fighter," the kind who "looks stinko in the gym, but when it comes down to putting everything on the line, he is always there to meet the bell," the coach recalls. "He always excels when under pressure."

Favoritism Alleged

The coach worked hard with North, so hard that Webb complained that it was unfair. Webb and North were intense competitors, who each commanded separate loyal followings, the coach says. Webb went on to win decorations in Vietnam, write acclaimed novels, become an undersecretary of defense and, finally, secretary of the Navy.

The North-Webb bout was legendary. It was very close. "Ollie didn't keep his hands up," Smith recalls. "He didn't move properly. He had that bad knee."

But he won.

The championship meant more to North than his coach realized at the time. Before graduation, North appeared at Smith's home and asked to borrow the film of the fight. "You know, Jimmy Webb is in the Marines," North told the coach. "And I've got to go before this board and prove to them that I'm man enough physically to be in the Marines. That film will help me prove it."

North showed the selection board the film and got his commission.

Ever striving, he skipped summer vacation again. Now a second lieutenant, North went directly to basic training at Quantico, Va. "I guess he was afraid the war wasn't going to wait for him," says Lt. Col. Jack Holly, a fellow midshipman at the academy.

When others at Quantico went to Washington for fun, North studied or checked out the terrain for mapping exercises, Holly says. His diligence got him to Vietnam 30 days before most of his fellow Annapolis graduates.

As a soldier, North courted the most dangerous assignments.

He was aggressive. When instinct told him to take cover, he charged. He reminded machine-gunner Randy Herrod of a Viking "berserker," a fighter who would go against extreme odds and battle until he dropped.

On May 25, 1969, after six months in Vietnam, North matched his father's highest decoration. He won the Silver Star.

During a battle near the Demilitarized Zone, a platoon leading an assault on a hill had been ambushed near the hill's crest. The platoon commander and a squad leader were seriously wounded. Their men radioed back to the captain for help.

In an instant, Herrod heard North on the radio. "Captain, second platoon ready to move up," North said. He turned to his men. "Here we go, boys."

They took off their packs, dumped them at the side of the trail and scrambled up the hill. North led them past the fallen first unit and to the top of the hill, where the North Vietnamese waited.

Cool Under Fire

Forty-five-caliber pistol in hand, North stood at the middle of the front line, under intense fire, and gave orders.

"He was just as cool as he was in a living room conversation," says another machine-gunner, Ernie Tuten.

The North Vietnamese, stunned by the quickness and aggressiveness of the assault, withdrew to another hill. After evacuating his casualties, North led another attack on the enemy's new position.

Continued

Again, the North Vietnamese retreated, and again North pursued. As casualties mounted and his unit's ammunition ran out, he halted the attack.

Repeatedly exposing himself to fire, North directed a resupply, an evacuation of casualties and air strikes. Finally, he initiated a fourth assault, moving from one Marine to another to direct their fire and exhort them.

It was "a last bold effort," North's citation says. And it worked. North and his men pushed the rest of the North Vietnamese from the ridge line.

If enemy fire meant little, national boundaries meant less; where others saw limits, North saw opportunity.

One night, North woke up his men for a secret operation they called "Hot Tamale." The Paris Peace talks were in progress, and the United States wanted to prove that the North Vietnamese were occupying the Demilitarized Zone, theoretically a no-fire area.

"We've got to go out," North told his sleepy men. "We need a prisoner."

Invaded the North

He and a staff sergeant each directed a team. The teams loaded into separate trucks and traveled over bomb craters and brush-covered terrain. They walked into the DMZ. North's point man spotted a North Vietnamese army guard across the 18th Parallel, which divided North and South Vietnam.

North did not stop to question whether he should invade the North. He just did it.

He and his point man crossed the 18th Parallel. Herrod and Tuten recall, and shot a North Vietnamese guard in the jaw.

They dragged him back to South Vietnam for interrogation.

After his tour in Vietnam, North taught tactics at Quantico. He and other instructors tried to make their classes as realistic as possible. By several accounts, North once jumped atop a classroom desk and fired blanks into the air.

Back in Vietnam, Randy Herrod had been charged with 16 counts of first-degree, premeditated murder in the slaying of five Vietnamese women and 11 children at the village of Son Thang in the Que Son Valley. The massacre happened after North had left Vietnam. But Herrod had once saved North's life, and North wanted to help.

He volunteered to testify for Herrod as a character witness. He got leave from the Marine Corps and returned to Southeast Asia.

There, he shared a hut with Denzil Garrison, one of Herrod's attorneys. Every night, Garrison says, North washed his combat fatigues. Every morning before dawn, he woke up to iron them, using spray starch and a travel iron he brought. "You could shave yourself in the shine on his shoes," Garrison says.

But North was restless. Just testifying was not enough. He decided to kill time free-lancing as a foot soldier. He made friends with members of a Marine reconnaissance unit camped nearby and accompanied them on their patrols. The unit's insignia was a skull and crossbones and the words: "Swift Silent Death."

Garrison worried that North would get himself killed before the trial.

"He went out day after day after day with them, just on a volunteer basis . . . ," Garrison says. 'He was over there on leave, volunteering for those damn patrols, and they were the most dangerous patrols that you could be on."

North testified, and Herrod was acquitted.

Three years later, North was assigned to Okinawa, Japan. He never liked downtime. During a 12-month tour that ended in December, 1974, he was on the job nearly 24 hours a day.

It strained his marriage, a friend says. Emotionally and physically exhausted, North returned to the United States. He entered Bethesda Naval Medical Center on Dec. 16, 1974. His friends say he had emotional problems. He stayed 22 days.

He saved his marriage—in part, his friends say, because he promised to spend at least one day a week with his family. One friend says he heard that the medical record of North's hospitalization was removed by his superior officer. The superior officer's widow says her husband never mentioned this, but North's friend says other officers who have seen North's personnel records describe them as spotless.

Kept Working

Despite his promises to his wife, North continued to work hard.

He was promoted to major and attended the Navy War College.

North joined the White House National Security Council staff on Oct. 1, 1983. White House officials recognized his compulsion to work long hours and took advantage of it.

"People were constantly saying, 'We need this by first thing tomorrow morning,' and Ollie was the kind of person who would never say, 'No, it can't be done.' Ollie would always take it," a former colleague says.

Another former White House associate says he admired North but believed that he needed supervision.

"For whatever reason, the decision was made by [former National Security Adviser Robert C.] McFarlane to have Ollie work directly for him without any intermediary supervision," the associate says. "I think McFarlane misjudged how much time he could give [to] supervising Ollie and, over time, Ollie worked more and more on his own."

Moreover, North bypassed normal bureaucratic channels. If he wanted former CIA Director William J. Casey to back him on a particular idea, North would visit him over the weekend to ensure Casey's support on Monday, a co-worker remembers.

North regularly telephoned government officials at home after midnight, insisting that they get out of bed and prepare whatever it was he believed he needed. Ollie himself often worked on only three hours of sleep.

Until his final months at the NSC, North had virtually no staff to help him and refused to relinquish responsibilities to colleagues. "If someone had an issue that they thought was theirs and Ollie thought it was his issue, he would try to grab it or push people aside," a co-worker says. "He wanted everybody to realize he was in charge."

'Crisis Junkie'

North became what this colleague describes as a "crisis junkie," exhilarated by the intense demands of the job and unable to pull back.

Ultimately, his drive to excel began to take a toll on Oliver North.

Once a month, like a ritual, he threatened to quit. He would pound the table and declare he was unappreciated, his co-worker recalls. "He would start screaming about Bud McFarlane and John Poindexter, how he hated this place and nobody listened to what he had to say. And then he would say, 'My orders are coming, I am going to be out of here in a month.'"

Continued

But colleagues grew accustomed to his unrestrained tirades and ignored them.

Vice Adm. John Poindexter, who succeeded McFarlane as national security adviser, eventually tried to establish more control over North. Co-workers say Poindexter tried to take responsibility for the contras away from North after Congress resumed aid. But North resisted. Finally, it was decided that North would share the responsiblity with two others.

Memoranda obtained by investigators show that Poindexter told North in May to invent a "cover story that I have insisted you stop [covert activities]."

However, by July, Poindexter seemed genuinely concerned. He considered advice from McFarlane that North be hospitalized because of his growing signs of strain. Poindexter met with North and later chastised him for being "too emotional."

But Poindexter continued to rely on him.

□

Charm has distinguished Ollie North since high school.

His English teacher remembers that North would laugh at his jokes. All of them.

To Bob Bowes, his social studies teacher, North possessed "all the attributes I think you'd want in a son."

North also got along well with most of his fellow students. "No social event would be complete without the presence of Larry North," his yearbook says.

"He was a charming person," his sister, Patricia, recalls.

Parents felt comfortable when their daughters went out with North. "They knew if they were out with us, we would bring their daughters home on time and there wouldn't be drinking," Peter Reiss, a high school friend, says.

Women remember North as a "gentleman" who stood when women entered. At the U.S. Naval Academy, when he went to the home of boxing coach Smith, North always opened doors for the coach's wife and addressed her as "ma'am."

Inspired Troops

"He's the type of young man that you'd hope that your daughter would go out with," Smith says. "In fact, my daughter and Larry are good friends too, and I always sort of hoped that maybe Ollie would like her. . . ."

But North already had pinned his hometown sweetheart. When they broke up, he dated a speech therapist he met through friends. She eventually broke off the relationship. But she says she never forgot North's "sweet face" and "boyish charm."

In Southeast Asia, North's confident walk, his straightforward speech, his intensity inspired a kind of fearful reverence in his troops.

"I was afraid of him," Herrod says. "He was the kind of man—he didn't demand respect. He commanded it. It exuded from him. You had to respect him."

North calculated ways to win loyalty. He advised fellow officer Don Moore to do the same. He told Moore to include a crate of onions and some hot sauce in the rations to make himself popular with the Latinos in his platoon. Moore took the advice, and it worked.

"He certainly could motivate his men," Moore says. "I never saw a morale problem."

If one of North's men collapsed in the heat and humidity, North would be at his side with empathy and water. If his troops were feeling low, North could somehow manage to come up with the right words to inspire them.

As men neared the end of their tours in Vietnam, some platoon leaders would let them hang back to avoid danger. But North's men would stay up front until the day they left Vietnam. And not because North told them. "You wanted to be with him," Herrod says.

Being in North's platoon was a symbol that you were tougher, braver and more gung-ho than the rest. North's radio code name was "Blue." His men called themselves, "Blue's Bastards."

"You didn't want to displease him . . ." Herrod says. "He made you able to do things that you didn't think you could do. He brought it out in me. He brought it out in everyone in the platoon. You did things that, after you thought about it, seemed impossible."

North was 5-foot-9, but he seemed larger. Herrod is startled when he looks at photographs of himself next to North. "I'm 6-foot-4 and it seemed like we could look eye to eye."

North's superiors in the Marine Corps regularly gave him outstanding evaluations. He was known as a good briefer of generals: poised, sharp and concise.

"He was not awed by rank but he was respectful," says retired Maj. Gen. Tom Haynes, North's commander at Okinawa. "He was bright, energetic, an attractive leader."

North's respectful ease with authority served him well at the White House, at least during his early years there. His boss, McFarlane, was another who thought of him as a son. Members of Congress say he addressed them as "sir" and made them feel important.

North knew when to be deferential and when not to be.

He once annoyed a lower-ranking Cabinet member by calling him by his first name. But he addressed as "sir" an NSC official who had control over how much money North's programs would get.

North had "an open quality that was easy to like," a former Administration official says. "He was a charmer. He was very straightforward, very willing to help you out. . . . He really had a winning personality. He was a guy you would trust."

He used his charm to manipulate the system. "Ollie played the system like an orchestra," a co-worker says. "He was really a conductor. He was able to touch all the instruments in the U.S. government and he knew how to do it very well."

Another colleague says North had an instinct for knowing how to address different kinds of people. Among fellow Marines, he swore with a vengeance. But in a meeting about hostages with senior members of the Episcopal Church, North sprinkled his conversation with religious references. "He was no longer a Marine," the colleague says. "He was an altar boy."

If facts failed him, North tried emotion. He would begin with flattery and end with an appeal to sympathy, the colleague says. When he found himself unable to persuade another to do what he wanted, North "would talk about how his war wounds were bothering him, how little sleep he had. . . .

"He was very effective at getting other people to do things for him."

He was so effective that another longtime colleague grew wary.

"After I got to know him awhile, I found he was a manipulator and he manipulated people very well," this colleague says. "So I kept my distance."

□

From the start, Ollie North was a

Continued

hard worker.

He learned diligence by discipline. It came early, at the Christian Bros. Academy in Albany, where strict Catholicism was compounded by a military regimen. Students wore uniforms. They went through a tough inspection every morning. Wrinkled shirts or unshined shoes cost demerits. A wisecrack in class brought a slap across the face.

After he transferred back to public school in Philmont, he served Mass at the Sacred Heart Church—long after some of his friends had stopped.

When he enrolled at State University of New York, College at Brockport, his world remained one of duty, diligence and dedication. He managed the basketball team, held student office, became a resident assistant and was put in charge of a dormitory.

But in the wider world of knowledge, North did not distinguish himself. He held a B average. He got a D in calculus/geometry but did well in science.

At the Naval Academy, however, North's dedication to duty and discipline won big rewards.

Few midshipmen get the honor of commanding their respective companies. At Annapolis, North won the honor twice.

Aimed for Marines

Academy graduates have a choice. They can serve as officers in the Navy—or they can go on to become officers in the Marine Corps. North never seriously doubted that he wanted to be a Marine.

Marine Corps candidates were a subculture at the academy. They were more aggressive, more conscious of their physical fitness. They wore red and gold gym shorts—Marine colors—when their superiors were not around to reprimand them for being out of academy garb. They yelled their own chants. They put Marine Corps posters on their walls. During drills or exercises, they were always at the top of the lines.

Single-mindedness served North well. The inscription under his picture in the academy yearbook declares that his heart was with "the corps, the corps, the corps." But there were hints that his world of discipline, duty and diligence was missing some parts of the larger picture.

"Ollie was no renaissance man," classmate Jack Holly recalls. "He is a very black-and-white type of individual who is very intense and works very hard . . . You know, there are some guys that . . . [are] a little gifted. Ollie, I don't think, was gifted in anything. . . . But he was so diligent. . . ."

At Quantico, where North completed his Marine Corps officers training, Holly remembers that little seemed to interest North apart from the Marines. "I'm trying to think what else Ollie did," Holly says.

"Really, nothing comes to mind."

By the Book

In Vietnam, North's discipline and diligence became remarkable.

By now, it was 1969; he was a Marine second lieutenant, and Randy Herrod and Ernie Tuten were in his platoon. They were at the DMZ.

"He did things by the book," Herrod recalls.

Helmet straps. North demanded that his men keep them buckled. Flak jackets. He ordered his men to keep their flak packs inside, no matter how heavy. Ammunition. His men didn't carry machine-gun rounds across their chests. He ordered them to leave the rounds in their boxes, so they wouldn't get dirty and make the guns jam. Grenades. Some troops carried them on their belts. But that meant the brush could yank out their pins. North ordered his men to carry them inside their flak jacket pockets.

"Everyone had his battle dressing," Herrod recalls. "You kept it on the side of your helmet. If you got hit and there was nobody to help, you could do that much yourself. Things like that he insisted on. Yes, sir. He was tight about that. You *did* that."

Tuten remembers too: "He always had his chin strap buckled. Not like John Wayne; John Wayne always had his undone. But Ollie had his buckled, and he had his .45 and his flak jacket on. A squared-away-looking dude."

Also, Herrod says, "what really sticks in my head is . . . he shaved every day in the field, which nobody else did."

He wasn't a martinet. Herrod remembers: "Back in the rear, getting drunk, raising a little Cain was OK. But you kept your weapon ready."

This attention to detail brought two results.

North's men regarded him highly. "He helped me survive that place," Tuten says. "I had four lieutenants the whole time I was over there, and I was over there about 11 months, and he was without a doubt the best. He did those things to protect us."

And his platoon won honors. "It was the honor platoon at the changing of the commander, Northern I Corps," Herrod says. "Second Platoon was Ollie's platoon. And it was chosen out of all of the Third Marine Division. It was picked out as the best platoon in the division. That was an honor."

But the bigger picture continued to elude North.

"He was big on getting the job done and done right," Tuten recalls. "He really just impressed me as one who was over there to win a war." But was it a war Americans should have been fighting? Why were they there? When Herrod and two other men asked him, North simply told them the United States was obliged to fight because it was a member of SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

"He'd talk to us," Herrod says, "but when he talked to us, he would talk to us about tactics; he'd teach us things that would help us. He wasn't into reflecting."

North Wounded

Several months after North arrived in Vietnam, Don Moore, also a second lieutenant, arrived to take over another platoon.

The first night, he shared North's tent.

Moore reached out to shake hands. It was dark. He felt bandages. North had been wounded by a grenade.

Then, by the light of a flickering candle, North gave Moore a matter-of-fact primer on Vietnam and the war: not the big picture, but every detail.

The next day, he gave Moore another lesson—this time about "fragging," what grunts called killing their own officers with fragmentation grenades. He tossed a

Continued

small stone onto the roof of a nearby hut where several officers were drinking.

As it rattled across the tin, the officers scrambled for cover.

Moore and North were still commanding platoons when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Dirty and battle-worn, Moore looked up from his foxhole and wondered just how civilized man had really become.

He spoke to North about it. But North, Moore recalls, just didn't get it. "He thought it was weird that I would even contemplate that kind of thing."

The next year, after he had completed his tour in Vietnam, North put his military career at stake: He either failed to grasp the larger political implications of what he took upon himself to do—or he realized his jeopardy and did it anyway.

Either way, when he volunteered to testify at Randy Herrod's massacre trial, defense attorney Gene Stipe says, North antagonized every senior officer in the Marine Corps who wanted to see Herrod convicted and put in prison for life. Denzil Garrison, co-counsel for the defense, figures that the Marine Corps wanted even more. "I've always thought," he says, "that for Randy they had the firing squad in mind."

Mindful of the bad publicity the Army still was enduring over My Lai, the Marines were intent on putting their scandal behind them as quickly as possible, even if it meant convicting some of their own of atrocities.

In fact, the massacre at Son Thang was being called "the Marines' My Lai," after a Vietnamese hamlet infamous for an Army slaughter two years before in which 150 to 200 women, children and old men had been killed.

North was not subpoenaed to testify on Herrod's behalf. He volunteered. More than that, Herrod's attorneys say, North paid his own way to San Francisco, then caught military planes to Saigon and on to Da Nang, where the court-martial was to be held.

North's value to the defense was considerable. He did what he was asked, without question.

Polled Officers

Herrod's lawyers tried to persuade the court to move his trial to the United States. They asked North to poll officers about whether they thought Herrod could receive a fair trial there at Da Nang. "There were some 60 officers at the base, and he was to get at least half of them and ask them," Garrison says. "He found 30, and it was 29-to-1 he couldn't get a fair trial."

The lone vote was a Marine major, Garrison says, who got angry and ran North out of the officers club.

North provided other information.

"The prosecutors were especially incensed," Garrison says, "because he was able to get us stuff that we wouldn't have been able to reach otherwise." Son Thang was really Son Thang *IV*, for example. The Roman numeral was the military's way of ranking Vietnamese hamlets. "*I* was all friendlies," Garrison says. "*II* was most friendly, some enemy. *III* most enemy, some friendly. *IV* was all enemy. That was very important to our defense. He's the one that tipped us off to what that *IV* meant."

But the most important thing North did was to give the defense a way to bring up Randy Herrod's Silver Star.

"They wouldn't let us introduce the fact that Randy had won it," Garrison recalls. "So we got it into the testimony through North. He had written Randy up for the decoration."

The citation said their company had come under heavy attack the night of July 28, 1969, three miles northwest of Cam Lo. A rocket-propelled grenade exploded nearby, wounding Herrod and two others—including North. Herrod dragged North and the other casualty into a gun emplacement and shielded them with his body.

"Ollie gave him credit for saving his life," defense attorney Stipe recalls. "The court, I think, was impressed."

Herrod was acquitted.

To Stipe, it seemed that North had put himself at considerable risk. The Marine Corps, Stipe remembers, wanted Herrod's hide. "They were pretty goddamn adamant." So why, Stipe wondered, had North gone to such great lengths to help? Had he understood the implications of what he was doing, the possible consequences?

"I discussed that with him," Stipe recalls. "And I kind of had the feeling that he had a deep sense of gratitude toward Randy Herrod. . . . I think that if somebody had said, 'OK, Lt. North, you go ahead and testify, and we're gonna bust your ass out,' I think he would have testified the same."

Disregard for the bigger picture, particularly political consequences and their impact upon his personal welfare, also attended North's tenure at the White House.

'Ride a Good Horse Hard'

"Because he was so task-oriented," says Jack Holly, his Annapolis schoolmate, he "was just given more. . . . It's the old adage: You ride a good horse hard and put him away wet." North was promoted to deputy director of political-military affairs. But his Marine Corps career was slipping away.

"Ollie has a problem in that some things he does, he doesn't perceive that they could be misconstrued," Holly says. "For example, people would call him from the Marine Corps, and the secretaries would say he would call them back.

"Ollie was terrible at ever calling back. . . . It's not a vindictiveness, it's just that, in Ollie's priorities, that always will fall way down. He is always focusing on some new project that is much, much more important. I think he rationalizes that, if you're really interested, you'll keep calling back.

"What happens is a lot of senior officers said, 'This arrogant f---, piss on him.'"

Most significant was North's failure, at times, to perceive the bigger picture, which placed his country at political risk.

'He'd Become a Hero'

"He was relatively anti-authority," says another Administration source. "He flouted authority. And because of that, he often didn't ask for authority—he just went and did it, and came back and said, 'I did this, and I was right.'

"And he'd become a hero, because what he did usually worked." But not always.

"That's great in combat," the source says. "But it doesn't work so well in the White House."

North was ethnocentric, says a government official outside the NSC.

"He saw things from a very American perspective," this official says. "He didn't really understand how things operated in other countries around the world, what were the forces at play. . . . He was not confined by the niceties of diplomacy or restricted by the knowledge of international affairs."

—Continued

North, recalls a colleague at the NSC, "tended to see the world in all black and white and not shades of gray. So you were either with him or against him. And that sort of outlook tends to blind you to the nuances that are reflective of the real world. If you didn't support his position on contra aid, you were some kind of commie."

Narrow task-orientation and failure to see the larger context, says North's NSC colleague, were two sides of the same coin: his single-mindedness.

"Single-mindedness was the thing that caused the most problems," the colleague says. "My problem with Ollie was that I didn't always trust his judgment. . . ."

□

Fantasy and reality blurred at times for Ollie North.

Apart from his reported attempt to hide the truth by stealing his Naval Academy medical records, there is little evidence that he tried to distort reality before he reached the National Security Council.

But at the NSC, where his work was often undercover and lies were called "disinformation," North moved in and out of the truth enough times to make some colleagues skeptical of his claims.

Although his sister, Patricia, says North does not exaggerate, someone who worked with him in the Administration warns: "One took everything Ollie said with a grain of salt."

Another colleague says North had a repertoire of adventure stories in which he inevitably was the protagonist. He told them as though he was describing a third person. "Ollie regarded himself as a legend in his own time . . ." the colleague says. "For all I know, the exploits might be true. It was just the way he would tell these stories about himself."

Many of the claims that North's detractors call lies do in fact contain truth. But not the whole truth.

In late 1985, North appeared as a character witness for former White House adviser Thomas C. Reed, who was tried and later acquitted of criminal fraud in an insider-trading case. Describing his background on the witness stand, North testified that he had taken "graduate courses at Catholic University in Georgetown, both in business and in political science." Officials at Catholic University say North completed one "introduction to graduate school" course in 1977. However, Catholic University of America is not in Georgetown. Georgetown University is. Officials there say there is no record that he took any any courses at their school.

He testified that he received "several Purple Hearts." North's military records show he had only two Purple Hearts. But soldiers who served with him in Vietnam said he was wounded at least four times in combat and would have received two additional Purple Hearts had he applied for them.

At the White House, North gave the impression that he was in danger. He told colleagues that Sandinista sympathizers had threatened him. For his trips abroad, he kept a bulletproof undershirt in his White House office, as well as a pair of sunglasses he described as bulletproof. He traveled outside the United States under the alias of "Mr. Good."

Danger an Honor

But a colleague says it was unclear whether North really believed himself to be in danger in Washington or created an aura of threats to make himself feel more important.

"Ollie wore danger like a badge of honor," the colleague says.

Unsettling things did happen to North, however.

In April, 1986, a spokesman for Abu Nidal said in a television interview that the terrorist group would attack Americans to avenge the U.S. bombing of Libya. He named as targets North; John Singlaub, a retired U.S general active in right-wing causes; and Dr. Edward Luttwak of Georgetown University, a former consultant to the Defense and State departments.

Although at least one colleague insists that the threat was "silly" and not to be taken seriously, North was disturbed by it.

North complained that his home had been vandalized. A friend says he saw the damage. North told a fellow NSC staff member that someone had put sugar in the gas tank of his pickup truck. No one disputes it. North says someone slashed his tires. The White House did in fact assign him a new parking space in a secure garage because of damage to his car. North told others that his dog had been poisoned. But a knowledgeable source says the dog actually died of cancer.

At the office, North tried to order around admirals or generals in the President's name. He regularly spoke as though he was "acting on instructions that came directly from the President," a colleague says.

"Ollie would say, 'Now that I've told you this, it's for the President and John [Poindexter] and you and I to know about, and nobody else,'" this colleague recounts, laughing.

At a Frankfurt, West Germany, meeting on the Iranian arms deal, North "misrepresented his access to the President and attributed to the President things the President never said," the President's Tower Commission said. North claimed that he had private meetings with Reagan at Camp David, the commission's report says. Reagan told the commission that the claim was "absolute fiction."

But, although North's relations with Reagan were not as close as he claimed, Ollie was always more than just a bureaucrat to the chief executive. A colleague says McFarlane and Poindexter brought North into their daily 9:30 a.m. foreign intelligence briefings for the President, possibly as often as once a week. North's visits would not have been part of the official schedule.

Of all NSC staff members, "Ollie was by far the closest to the President," a co-worker says. "The President would recognize the rest of us. But Ollie North he knew by name and would call by first

Continued

name." During his final high-pressure months at the NSC, when North was deeply immersed in covert operations, he increasingly deemed deception part of duty. He once used an unsuspecting colleague to plant a lie for him.

An Administration source describes the incident this way:

North told the colleague last spring that the U.S. had no plans to attack Libya in retaliation for terrorist activities and assured him that he could pass this information on to a news reporter. The information was dutifully leaked and featured prominently on network news.

Later, North laughed and congratulated his colleague on a "great piece of disinformation." The U.S. had in fact been planning retaliation.

The unwitting partner in North's deception expressed anger at being tricked.

North turned cold and furious.

"If you don't like it, then f--- you," North said. He turned and walked off.

"They [North's superiors] used him to plant a number of stories in the press," an Administration source says. "But Ollie ran his own little disinformation campaign that was independent of whatever they told him to do."

North's final "disinformation campaign" in the White House came last November. News stories that month reported U.S. arms sales to Iran, and North told colleagues that the reports were false.

He said the government had not exchanged arms for the hostages. Rather, North said, his "friends" had kidnaped the relatives of high-ranking Iranian officials and put them in "cages." Eventually, he said, the Iranians would be traded for the U.S. hostages.

North's astonished colleagues at the NSC pressed him about the bizarre account. North insisted that it was true. Finally, one of the staff members called the CIA about it.

The CIA said it was a lie.

□

Oliver North, fired from his White House job, spends a lot of time these days in the downtown Washington office of his attorney. He reports regularly to a desk job at the Marine Corps, where officials give him as much time as he needs to work on his legal problems. His duties involve internal Marine Corps service matters.

People say they have seen him show up on Friday nights at the basketball games of Herndon High School, the Virginia suburban school his daughter attends. She is a cheerleader. On Sundays, he attends the Church of the Apostles, a charismatic Episcopal church in Fairfax, Va. He has described himself to a fellow White House employee as a "born-again Christian."

Friends say he seems serene and confident. He carries a Bible and pulls it out to read if the pressures start to build. He once told reporters that he felt abandoned by his former friends and colleagues. He referred them to Psalms 7, Verse 1.

It reads: "O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: Save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me."