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ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1A1**Skilled Secret Soldier****Secord — A  
Specialist in  
Covert Deals**By BOB DROGIN,  
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WASHINGTON—When historians write the final analysis of the Iran-*contra* scandal, perhaps they should start with Ricard V. Secord's 1972 master's thesis.

His topic: "Unconventional warfare/covert operations as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy." His thesis director: the CIA adviser to the head of the U.S. Naval War College.

The CIA should be given "the authority" to run all such operations, Secord wrote at the start of the 55-page document. The Pentagon should be "removed from the chain of command," and "parochial outcries" from competing government groups should be ignored.

**'Dismiss Obstacles'**

"Bureaucratic obstacles should be dismissed out of hand," he wrote. So should opposition from "the press, Congress, academia and others." A high-level group, "probably the National Security Council," should "develop and implement the required programs."

That Secord wrote a virtual outline 15 years ago for the NSC and CIA role in the Iran arms affair—and that he is a pivotal player in the still unfolding historical drama—comes as no shock to his friends. To them, Secord remains the very model of a modern major general.

A West Point grad. A hero of the Congo. A veteran of 285 combat flights in Indochina. A manager of the secret CIA air war in Laos. A skilled secret soldier and covert operations artist. Winner of a presidential medal. A proud patriot and warrior who practiced what he preached.

There is the public Secord. He was the rising Pentagon star, the young two-star general appointed as the first non-civilian to serve as

a deputy assistant secretary of defense in one of the most sensitive posts in the Pentagon. He testified before Congress, hobnobbed with Mideast potentates, and oversaw \$30 billion in Air Force sales to about 60 countries.

**'Mission Impossible'**

"I thought he was going to be one of our top generals and probably chief of staff of the Air Force," said retired Brig. Gen. Harry C. Aderholt, a longtime friend.

There is the professional Secord. He was the can-do pilot who once followed CIA orders to dump a plane-load of dishwasher detergent along the Ho Chi Minh trail so trucks and troops would slip and slide off in the rainy season—and did it in broad daylight so the CIA could take pictures.

"He's like a character from 'Mission Impossible,'" said David Henry, a former Air Commando who flew with him.

There is the private Secord. He was the no-nonsense, tight-lipped student who learned strict West Point discipline from now-presidential candidate Alexander M. Haig Jr. He was the pudgy pilot they called "the Fat Man," the cool-as-ice officer who stopped a domestic argument by pulling a gun away from an angry airman. Even his friends say they barely know him.

"We're talking cold blue steel," said Noel C. Koch, a former deputy secretary of defense who met with him recently.

There is the suspect Secord. Never indicted, he bitterly quit the Pentagon in 1983 complaining that he had "been tarred" by a two-year federal investigation into his ties to renegade CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson and two men whose company bilked the Pentagon out of \$8 million.

"He was one of the focuses of the investigation," said Theodore S. Greenberg, an assistant U.S. attorney in Alexandria, Va.

And there is the businessman Secord. He was the privateer and international arms dealer, the specialist in secret shipping, shell companies and Swiss bank accounts. He was a supply master to the Nicaraguan resistance forces, once even selling them \$2.5 million in AK-47 ammunition from a surprising source.

**Purchase From China**

"Secord engineered the purchase from China," said contra leader Adolfo Calero. "I don't know how."

Thus, both his friends and enemies say, Dick Secord was uniquely prepared in temperament and training when National Security Council aide Oliver L. North wrote him on Nov. 19, 1985 to ask for help.

According to North, a secret plan to trade 120 Israeli HAWK anti-aircraft missiles to Iran for five American hostages was collapsing. Portugal was refusing transshipment rights. The CIA had fouled up. White House officials were frantic.

"Your discrete [sic] assistance is again required in support of our national interest," North wrote his longtime friend, according to the Tower board report. ". . . As in the past, you should exercise great caution that this activity does not become public knowledge. You should ensure that only those whose discretion is guaranteed are involved."

Secord quickly chartered a jet to fly 18 HAWKs to Iran under cover of a "humanitarian mission."

"One hell of an operation," North crowed. Except that the Iranians later claimed that they had been cheated, that the HAWKs were too few, too old, and too expensive—and none of the hostages were released.

Over the next year, Secord became North's top lieutenant. Investigators say he was the "black-ops" jack-of-all-trades whose operations included coordinating arms shipments to Iran, controlling Swiss bank accounts for the transactions, and allegedly using the profits to supply weapons to the contras at a time when U.S. military aid was illegal.

"A man of many talents, ol' Secord is," North wrote in appreciation. He "deserves a medal."

Last week, a U.S. Senate committee saw Secord's talents another way.

On Wednesday, the select committee investigating the Iran-*contra* scandal asked a federal court to force Secord to release his foreign bank records or face jail for contempt.

The Justice Department has separately asked Swiss authorities for Secord's bank records, citing fraud and abuse of power.

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The Tower board reported that at least \$32 million from the Iran arms deals, and up to \$40 million in alleged contributions for the contras, were funneled through Secord's accounts. What happened to most of the money remains a mystery.

"If I could choose just one person to come in here and tell us everything, I would choose Secord," Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told reporters.

So far, however, Secord has invoked his Fifth Amendment rights to remain silent before two congressional committees and said little in public.

"Any portrait that would be painted of him as a profiteer would be absolutely erroneous," his lawyer, Thomas Green, told Senate investigators. Secord and his business partner, Albert A. Hakim, felt they were "doing the Lord's work," he said.

But others said Secord has only lived up to his own shadowy reputation.

"I'm not surprised," said E. Lawrence Barcella, a former federal prosecutor who investigated Secord's role in the CIA scandal. "I don't find it a surprise at all."

One of three children, Richard Vernon Secord was born July 6, 1932, in La Rue, Ohio, a central Ohio farming town on the Scioto River. His father, Lowell, was a truck driver. His mother, Wahnetta, said in a brief telephone interview that she is "definitely proud" of her son. "He's done nothing illegal. I'm very honored to be his mother."

Secord attended South High School in Columbus, where records show he drew A's and B's and had a perfect attendance record. His good grades helped him win a congressional appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1951, moving into a cramped barracks over Grant Hall.

In those days, the Point separated its students by height. Short and stocky, Secord was assigned to 1st Regiment's Company M-1—for those under 5-foot-8.

"We were called the runts," recalled freshman roommate Frank J. Robertson, now a retired Army colonel.

Secord's first year at the Point was his worst.

"When Richard first came to West Point, he was not very happy," Robertson said. "He didn't study. He was failing in his sub-

jects. We even got into a wrestling match about it. I was highly incensed. I felt he had taken an appointment and was squandering it away. He became very upset.

"Then one night he came home from supper . . . and he said: 'I want to tell you something. I've decided to stay,'" Robertson continued. "And it was amazing. His academics zoomed to the top. By the second year, he was wearing stars, which means he was in the top 10%."

#### A Tough Tactical Officer

Part of the change, friends say, was due to the company's tough tactical officer, then-Capt. Haig, who went on to become a secretary of state and candidate for the 1968 Republican presidential nomination. Haig was in charge of M-1's daily military training. He drove his boys hard but was fair, classmates say, occasionally issuing demerits to Secord for minor infractions.

Fellow cadets say Secord spoke little of his family. He was prim and private, "a very serious kind of guy" who kept to himself, classmate Donald C. Poorman said. He rarely joined student high jinks, and kept his distance from a group known as the "bad guys" who drank shaving lotion and once tossed a locker down stairs. He double-dated with Robertson in New York, joining stiffly in evenings on the town.

"He always sat very tall," Robertson recalled. "He was obviously enjoying himself, but it was difficult to know it unless you knew him."

But Secord was loyal to his friends. In his sophomore year, Secord testified before a regimental review board on behalf of a friend accused of barring a Jewish handball team from playing on campus.

#### 'They Dropped All Charges'

"Dick volunteered to help out," the friend recalled. "It wasn't something he had to do. And they dropped all charges."

Although friends invariably describe him as "brilliant," Secord was not an exceptional student. When he graduated in 1955, he ranked 193rd in a class of 470.

"He worked hard and he got through," recalled Thomas P. McGrevey, Secord's roommate for two years. "That's what's important."

Secord's yearbook picture shows an intense, unsmiling man with jug ears and a thick brown, brush-cut hair style that hasn't changed in 32 years. Something else hasn't changed. "His cold, calculating weekend mannerisms will be with us always," says the inscription.

But Secord had guts. At Air Force flight school after graduation, one classmate recalled, Secord outmaneuvered everyone in a mock dogfight. Later, the students discovered Secord had drained his fuel tanks to lower the plane's weight and make it easier to control.

#### Met His Future Wife

After three years as a single-engine jet instructor in Texas, Secord was assigned in 1959 to Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. There he met Jo Ann Gibson, his future wife. But with newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy issuing stirring calls to "bear any burden" in defense of liberty, Secord longed for action.

In August, 1961, he volunteered for a special tactical group being formed at Hurlburt Field, part of the giant Eglin Air Force Base complex in Florida's steamy panhandle. He became an elite Air Commando, serving tours both in South Vietnam and Iran over the next four years.

Most Americans had never heard of Vietnam then. Secord got to know it well, flying more than 200 missions across the country in AT-28 "Jungle Jim" fighter planes in less than a year. Officially, he was an "adviser," helping the Vietnamese pilots. In reality, Secord was a top gun.

#### 'Dick Got a Lucky Hit'

"He and Tom Temple were in the lead for who had the most kills," recalled Aderholt, the retired general. "Sampan, boats, hootches, gooks, or whatever. Sometimes just palm trees. But Dick got a lucky hit. He apparently hit an ammunition depot. The whole area blew up."

Pentagon records show he won at least four combat air medals in 1962. One citation says he faced "constant danger" and was exposed to "frequent ground fire from Viet Cong Communist guerrillas." Explained a fellow pilot: "His plane took a lot of holes."

In November, 1964, Secord apparently drew a special assignment in Africa. Simba rebels had cap-

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tured hundreds of white hostages in Stanleyville, a remote river town in the Belgian Congo. Secord was assigned to help fly in Belgian paratroopers for the rescue, according to a study published in 1980 by the National Defense University. He made an emergency landing, however, after a wing panel opened in mid-flight and an inflated life raft wrapped around the C-130's tail controls, the study reported.

#### Unconventional Warfare

In 1965, Secord attended the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College in Montgomery, Ala. His specialty was unconventional warfare, and he helped the faculty develop a course on "small wars, low-intensity conflicts," recalls one classmate. "Dick did an outstanding job on that," he said.

But Secord was bored. In August, 1966, he went back to Saigon, and then to a classified CIA unit at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base in northeast Thailand.

The CIA had secretly trained and supplied an army of nearly 40,000 hill-tribe guerrillas in neighboring Laos. Scattered on craggy peaks and steep ridges, the Meo troops guarded radar installations and beacons vital to U.S. bombers, rescued downed American pilots and battled Pathet Lao troops in the field.

For two years, Secord coordinated clandestine flights by Air America and other CIA airlines to dozens of remote airfields in Laos. "He was responsible for the air sector," said a former CIA officer who worked closely with him. Secord didn't remain on the ground, either. He flew dozens of missions in spotter planes and bombers. He still tells friends of one of the wilder flights.

"When they decided to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail, the hobby shop at the Agency decided to drop Calgonite on the trail in the rainy season, hoping to make the trail so slippery that no one could pass on it," recalled his friend Koch, the former deputy secretary of defense. "Dick was in charge. It was asinine. He had to drop it in daylight hours so people could take pictures. And he did it."

Years later, Secord's Indochina experience would come back to haunt him. A public-interest law firm called the Christic Institute filed a \$22-million federal suit in Miami last May that alleges Secord and 27 others participated in an

elaborate worldwide scheme of assassinations, terrorism, embezzlement and drug smuggling.

In December, the Institute's lawyer, Daniel Sheehan, filed an affidavit saying Secord "secretly smuggled . . . large suitcases" of money from opium sales in Laos to an Australian bank. Congressional investigators now are studying a 1983 Australian government report that reportedly links Secord to the bank, Nugan Hand Bank of Sydney. The concern collapsed in 1980 amid charges that it had laundered money from sales of weapons and illicit drugs.

#### Denied All Charges

Secord has denied all charges in the Miami suit. "I can't imagine where the hell they got this kind of junk," said a co-defendant, who has discussed the case with Secord.

In September, 1968, Secord went back to Hurlburt. He was quickly made commander of the 603rd Special Operations Squadron. His cold, gruff mannerisms were still a problem.

"He wasn't what you call Mr. Personality," recalled Lee Griffin, Secord's operations officer. One pilot even complained to Aderholt, the Air Commandos' leader.

"I said you're going to screw up a hell of a good squadron by putting this guy in," David Henry recalled. "He doesn't have the personality to handle a bunch of young airmen. Well, Dick proved me wrong. He had changed a lot."

Secord drew raves when he belied-in a disabled trainer jet on the beach, barely scratching the paint. Friends were touched when he let the widow of a fellow pilot live at his house. Secord wasn't the stern, salutin' disciplinarian the pilots had feared. They called him "the fat man" or "the round guy."

Secord used his Vietnam experience to change the training regimen. He introduced new midair refueling techniques. He coordinated special air shows for visiting Pentagon brass, running spectacular midnight shows of rockets and tracers, bombs and napalm.

"Dick was a very dedicated soldier," said retired Maj. Gen. L.W. Svendsen Jr., who flew with Secord then and has remained a friend. "He pressed on until the mission was accomplished. Dick got the job done."

On weekends, Secord and a small group of friends would fish for king

mackerel and amberjack. He golfed, hunted a bit, and played a fair game of tennis. He and Jo Ann had a daughter, Julie, and twins Laura and John. Friends kept their barbecue busy.

And by the time Secord left Florida in 1971, his squadron gave him the highest compliment they knew. "People said, 'The old man's never wrong,'" Henry recalled.

#### Returned to School

Then-Lt. Col. Secord returned to school, this time attending a special George Washington University one-year graduate degree program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. He was one of only 16 Air Force officers in a class of 203. He clearly drew on his own experience.

His master's thesis cited examples from the Congo, Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam and Laos. Unconventional warfare/covert operations are "a most valuable tool among the array of foreign policy instrumentalities available to the U.S.," he wrote.

After that, Secord's career began to take off.

"They keep referring to me as a shadowy figure," Secord complained to the Chicago Tribune in a rare interview last January. "I've held some of the highest-profile jobs in the government."

Promoted to full colonel in 1972, he moved to the Pentagon and was desk officer for Southeast Asia as the last U.S. ground troops withdrew and the long war drew to a torturous close. A year later, he was aide to the director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency, which manages foreign military sales and assistance.

In September, 1975, Secord was sent to Iran again. This time, he headed the Air Force Military Assistance Advisory Group. That meant he was chief Air Force salesman to the shah of Iran. And the shah was spending billions of dollars to build an Air Force of about 500 combat aircraft—bigger than that of Israel, Germany or France.

The shah's air force was designed on the U.S. model. Most of the officers were trained in the U.S. They spoke English in flight. Even the squadron buildings were American designed. And thousands of American contractors roamed the country.

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Under President Carter, Secord helped negotiate the sale and deployment of the most sensitive and sophisticated U.S. weapons to the shah—including airborne warning and control system (AWACS) planes, F-4 Phantoms, F-5 Tiger fighter bombers, and top-of-the-line swing-wing F-14 Tomcats equipped with long-range Phoenix air-to-air missiles. His work won the highest peacetime Air Force medal.

#### **'Worked Very Hard'**

"Dick worked very hard there," said one colleague. "He did a lot of flying with them, he spent a lot of time at the shah's palace. Like everywhere, he bloomed where he was planted."

Secord left in July, 1978, six months before the shah fled and the Ayatollah Khomeini took power. But two years later, he almost went back. When the first U.S. rescue mission of 52 American hostages ended in a fiery disaster on the Iranian desert in April, 1980, Secord was asked to help in a little-known second rescue attempt.

"He was my deputy," said retired Army Maj. Gen. James Vaught, a Delta Force commando leader who was planning the mission. Aderholt said Secord spent six months "whipping that outfit into shape" in Colorado. The operation was scrubbed, he said, after an accident caused "a few fatalities."

But Secord had plenty of work in Washington. For three years, he supervised foreign military sales for the Air Force, responsible for \$30 billion in programs in about 60 countries. "It was a very large volume business," he once said.

"He had the whole world," a former Pentagon division chief explained. "Anything our Air Force sold around the world, he had responsibility for."

Secord also was politically savvy. In April, 1981, he was appointed as the first non-civilian to serve as deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Near East, Africa and South Asia. It meant setting defense policy toward India, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon—about 40 countries in all.

Apparently working with NSC aide North for the first time, Secord became a highly visible commander in the new Reagan Administration's bitter battle with Congress to sell advanced AWACS electronic surveillance planes and F-15 jets to

Saudi Arabia. Secord later testified that he was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal, "at the request of the President," after the Senate narrowly approved the sale.

#### **Wilson Imprisoned**

But then came disaster. His name was Edwin P. Wilson.

Wilson, once in charge of the CIA's secret shipping companies, had amassed tens of millions of dollars on a salary of \$32,000 a year. Federal prosecutors charged that he had arranged assassination attempts for Libya's Col. Moammar Kadafi, had supplied Kadafi with thousands of pounds of powerful C-4 plastic explosives, and had trained Libyan troops with veterans of the Green Berets. He is now serving a 52-year federal prison sentence.

Wilson, however, claimed that he had been providing valuable intelligence to Secord. On Feb. 3, 1985, during the C-4 smuggling trial, Wilson's lawyers called Secord to testify.

Secord said he had first met Wilson in 1971. They had met twice in Tehran in 1976-77, and twice again in Brussels in 1979-80, he said. At one meeting, he acknowledged, Wilson offered to provide a Soviet MIG-25. "I was interested," Secord said, according to a transcript.

#### **No Wrongdoing Charged**

Prosecutors, in turn, were interested in Secord. They said he had visited Wilson's lavish Mt. Airy Farms estate in the Virginia hunt country several times, frequently had borrowed Wilson's private plane, and had sold him a house in Fairfax County, Va., when Secord was in a financial crunch.

Secord was not charged with any wrongdoing. But his name stayed in the news.

A defunct Virginia-based company called Egyptian American Transport & Services Corp., or Eatsco, pleaded guilty to overcharging the Pentagon by \$8 million for transporting U.S. arms to Egypt. One of the partners was Thomas G. Clines, a former ranking CIA agent who had introduced Secord to Wilson.

Prosecutors said Secord had overseen some of the Egyptian arms sales. And Wilson and his secretary claimed that Secord was a silent partner in Eatsco. Secord angrily denied any improper ties.

The case was "laughable," he told the Chicago Tribune.

"I had handled huge contracts that were classified," he said. "There was no way you could account for all of the money. What they were talking about was peanuts. I guess I was sort of insulted that they would accuse me of stealing so little."

There was another problem. Douglas Schlacter, a former Wilson aide, told CBS News in November, 1981, that Secord had shared profits from Wilson's illegal arms sales. The charge was "bone chilling," Secord said later.

The FBI launched an investigation and Secord was suspended for three months in early 1982. A third star was sidetracked. His career, he said, was ruined.

In April, 1983, Secord won partial vindication. He had sued Schlacter for libel and slander and a federal court judge in Washington awarded Secord \$2 million in a default judgment. But it was a hollow victory. Schlacter had disappeared into the federal witness protection program. He neither contested the suit nor paid the money.

"I have been tarred . . . ." Secord testified at the single court hearing. "No matter what I have done, I can't get rid of this shadow that's been hanging over me."

Secord retired in May, 1983, and now draws an Air Force pension of \$3,800 a month. Until last August, he stayed on an Air Force advisory panel on unconventional warfare policy. Although authorized to draw \$242 a day, he never did. Air Force records show.

Secord had other business to attend to. He and his wife formed Secord Associates and bought three houses for investment near their 11-room home in McLean, Va., a Washington suburb.

More important, he hooked up with Albert Hakim again. They had met in Tehran in the mid-1970s while Secord was running the military advisory group. In a 1983 deposition in Connecticut, Hakim admitted that he had used Swiss bank accounts to funnel millions of dollars in payoffs to Iranian military officials at the time.

#### **High-Tech Security**

Hakim ran several companies, including Stanford Technology Corp., a Silicon Valley firm that developed high-tech security systems. Secord took over an affiliate

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called Stanford Technology Trading Group in Vienna, Va. Together they tried to sell security systems to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and South Korea's nuclear power agency, according to a company lawyer.

But business was tough. In mid-1984, they represented Marwais Steel Co. of Larkspur, Calif., seeking a \$100-million aircraft shelter contract from the United Arab Emirates. Despite months of hard work by Secord and Hakim, an Italian company won the bid.

"Dick was not happy," said one friend. "He'd worked that contract hard for a year and a half and came in second."

Secord's relations with Middle Eastern leaders remains something of a mystery. Published reports have said the Saudi royal family helped Secord in the Marwais negotiations, and even offered to put his children through college when he retired. But one friend says Secord laughs at the reports.

"He says if it's true, how come he didn't get any projects there?" the friend said.

#### **Soon Had Other Projects**

And Secord soon had other projects. Congress cut off military aid to the contras in October, 1984. Investigators say Secord stepped in as a secret supplier—and reported regularly to North.

Working with ex-CIA and military associates, and relying on former Air America pilots, records show, Secord used a web of shell companies and Swiss accounts to help provide planes, medicine and hundreds of tons of arms and ammunition.

"We supposedly worked for the man in Nicaragua," said Frank Hines, a pilot who dropped supplies to the rebel forces on five missions from the Ilopango air base in El Salvador last September. He was paid \$3,000 a month, but the five aging planes required constant maintenance and repair. "This was not high-tech," he said.

Secord's reputation for his work with the contras is less than sterling. "Nobody had any respect for him," said another pilot. Contra leaders say he charged too much. And his mannerisms apparently hadn't changed.

"He could look at you so cold, it was frightening," one contra leader said.

"He was what we would call the contra connection for profiteering," said Thomas V. Posey, who heads an Alabama-based contra supply group called Civilian Material Assistance. "He tried to play 007."

Ultimately, Secord's ties to the contras were his undoing. When Sandinista soldiers shot down a C-123K loaded with arms over southern Nicaragua last Oct. 5, killing three crewmen and capturing one, telephone records indicated that the pilots had called Secord's home and office from their "safe house."

Since then, a barrage of revelations has shown that Secord—using the code name "Copp"—helped North plan, organize and direct one of the strangest episodes of modern U.S. history.

#### **Kept a Low Profile**

Since then, too, Secord has kept a low profile. Process servers in a civil suit recently gave up after two months of visiting his home and office, a neighbor said. He could not be reached for this story and his attorney did not return phone calls. Friends say the ordeal is taking a toll.

"His morale is not the highest," said his old friend Svendsen, who spoke to him recently. "I think he's depressed because he thought he was doing something for his country. The White House asked him to do something, and he did it."

"He says he's innocent of any wrongdoing," agreed former Pentagon official Koch. "He's confident of vindication. He's sure the system will work to clear his name."

"I'm not sure he's not being a little naive. I'm not sure we're not of two minds on that."

**Times researcher Aleta Embrey contributed to this story.**