

OBITUARIES

William F. Raborn Is Dead at 84; Led Production of Polaris Missile

By **MICHAEL WINES**
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WASHINGTON, March 12 — William F. Raborn Jr., a retired Navy vice admiral who led the development of the Polaris nuclear missile in the 1950's and later headed the Central Intelligence Agency under President Lyndon B. Johnson, died of cardiac arrest on March 7 at his home in McLean, Va. He was 84 years old.

Admiral Raborn was the first director of the Navy's Fleet Ballistic Missile Program, which supervised development and production of the world's first submarine-launched nuclear missile, the Polaris. The weapon was hailed as an American triumph in the arms race and as a boon to the country's allies, whose acceptance of American nuclear missiles on their soil was a constant source of friction with the Soviet Union.

More important, the Polaris proved the harbinger of a series of submarine-launched missiles that changed the nature of the American nuclear force. Today, more than half of all nuclear warheads are carried on missiles and torpedoes in submarines, largely because the vessels are mobile and extremely difficult to detect.

Admiral Raborn was widely praised for completing development of the missile well ahead of schedule by holding his staff strictly accountable for each stage in the weapon's progress. Among colleagues, he was regarded as a skilled seaman and manager, a man who kept on his office walls pictures of great naval officers as well as organizers in science and industry.

He was also the quintessential military man who, it is reported, rushed out of retirement in 1965 after President Johnson asked him to succeed John A. McCone as Director of Central Intelligence.

In his book on the C.I.A., "The Agency," John Raneleagh quoted a former colleague of Admiral Raborn who described the admiral's reaction when sworn in as Director: "After the President had said some kind things about him, about how he'd searched the country over and the only man he could find really capable of running it was 'Red' Raborn, there he was with tears trickling down his cheeks and coming off his chin in steady little drops. They really were."

Mr. Raborn was Director of Central Intelligence from April 1965 to June 1966, when he was succeeded by his deputy, Richard M. Helms.

His tenure was widely described as a difficult one. His predecessor, Mr. McCone, had been dismissed, in part because he openly disagreed with the President on intelligence issues involving the expanding war in Vietnam. Mr. Raborn, trained in the military hierarchy, worked to satisfy President Johnson's demands that the agency provide more intelligence and run clandestine operations in the war.

William Francis Raborn Jr. was born June 8, 1905, in Decatur, Tex. He graduated from the United States

Naval Academy in 1928 and was commissioned an ensign. After World War II service in Washington and at sea, he became a captain in 1945, and in 1952 he was made an official in the guided missile division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

In 1954, he became commander of the destroyer Bennington, where his Navy career took an abrupt and, it first seemed, unfortunate turn. In May 1954, an explosion and fire below decks killed 91 of the Bennington's crew and injured at least 20. Although Captain Raborn was praised for his handling of the disaster, he was assigned to a program that ranked near the bottom of the Navy's priorities: developing an intercontinental nuclear missile for submarines.

He took charge of the Polaris project on Jan. 1, 1956, by then a rear admiral, and rode herd on its manufacturers and planners. On July 20, 1960, the first Polaris was launched from a submarine, the George Washington, that was submerged off Cape Canaveral.

The missile landed on target 1,150 miles away.

Admiral Raborn retired from the Navy in 1963 and moved to California, where he became a vice president of the Aerojet-General Corporation. He returned to the company for three years after serving as director of the C.I.A.

From 1970 to 1986, he managed his own concern, the W. F. Raborn Company, in McLean.

Admiral Raborn received the Distinguished Service Medal and the Presidential National Security Medal during his years in the Navy and at the C.I.A.

He is survived by his wife, Mildred T. Raborn; a son, William F. Raborn 3d, and a daughter, Priscilla Richardson, both of California; three brothers, B. M. Raborn, C. B. Raborn and R. C. Raborn, all of Texas, and four grandchildren. He was buried in the United States Naval Academy Cemetery in Annapolis, Md.

- The Washington Post _____
- The New York Times D-24
- The Washington Times _____
- The Wall Street Journal _____
- The Christian Science Monitor _____
- New York Daily News _____
- USA Today _____
- The Chicago Tribune _____

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