

New Civilian Chief of the Army

Robert Frederick Froehlke

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WASHINGTON, June 15—About 40 years ago, Melvin R. Laird, Robert Frederick Froehlke and Nancy J. Barnes were in the fourth grade together at Marshfield, Wis. Melvin and Robert were chums, and Nancy was Robert's girl friend. Mr. Laird and Mr. Froehlke are still

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close friends as well as associates at the high levels of Government, and Nancy has become Mrs.

Froehlke, mother of four. The latest phase in the relationship between the two men is that Secretary of Defense Laird has backed Mr. Froehlke, aged 48, the Assistant Secretary for Administration, for appointment by the President as Secretary of the troubled United States Army.

Adjoining Quarters

The appointment was one more in a long series of situations, beginning with schoolyard altercations, when the two have helped each other out.

Not that either was ever particularly belligerent. Bob Froehlke was known then for his sunny disposition, according to schoolmates—"sunny, good-natured, wholesome; in fact, a jolly boy who has become a jolly man," according to one long-time associate.

In high school the two friends were active in debating and on the basketball team. Later, when they were

at the University of Wisconsin Law School and Mr. Froehlke had just been married to Nancy Barnes, the Froehlkes and the Lairds had adjoining quarters in a duplex.

Mr. Froehlke financed his studies with two jobs, one as a janitor, the other in the university law library.

Again in the nineteen-fifties, when Mr. Froehlke was beginning a career in insurance, the two couples shared living quarters.

Mr. Froehlke rose swiftly. As a student he had been brilliant, qualifying for Coif, the legal honor society. Three years in the Army, from which he emerged as a captain in 1946, had given him maturity.

Managed Campaign

After eight years in the legal department of Sentry Insurance in Stevens Point, Wis., the company, which had specialized in casualty insurance, opened a life insurance company and put Mr. Froehlke in charge. The company prospered. Mr. Froehlke headed the local Kiwanis Club and traveled to nearly every state in the Union, making speeches and friends.

He found time along the way to help his old friend, Mr. Laird, by managing eight successful campaigns for the House.

In August, 1968, the thoroughly Midwestern Froehlkes were transferred to Boston, where he became resident

vice president of the Sentry Insurance Company. Mr. Laird, by then Secretary of Defense in the Nixon Administration, enlisted him as Assistant Secretary in January, 1969.

In this capacity, Mr. Froehlke became known as "an expert at keeping people happy." He kept up morale in the much-buffed Defense Department by organizing frequent weekend outings for the top hundred or so executives to such places as Airley House in Warren, Va.

Headed Investigation

He also organized a smaller group of 20 executives who have been meeting for breakfast every Wednesday in the Secretary's dining room at the Pentagon.

In addition to his general administrative duties, Mr. Laird gave Mr. Froehlke special duties overseeing the far-flung intelligence operations of the Army, Navy and Air Force. When Army intelligence was accused of engaging in surveillance of civilian political figures, Mr. Laird called on Mr. Froehlke again, this time to head an investigative review commission.

The Froehlkes live in an unostentatious house in Bethesda, Md., with the two youngest of their four children, Scott, 13, and Anne, who is in high school. Another daughter, Jane, is at the University of Miami and the eldest son, Bruce, 22, is on the staff of a commission dealing with higher education



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"An expert at keeping people happy."

appointed by the Governor of Wisconsin.

Mr. Froehlke keeps himself slender by playing tennis at Fort Myer, Va. He does not smoke and rarely takes a drink.

Now Mr. Laird has asked his friend to render him the most difficult service he has ever attempted, running an Army that has been wracked in recent years by a series of troubles.

Mr. Froehlke is taking it with a smile, convinced that the techniques that succeeded in law school, life insurance and as a defense Department administrator will work again.