



Some of Buzhardt's associates consider him an outstanding authority on tactical warfare and tactical weapons

By Rudy Abramson
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Faithful to his heritage as a Southern gentleman, J. Fred Buzhardt Jr. studied at West Point, served as a military officer, became a lawyer, then settled down in 1952 as a pillar of the community of McCormick, S.C. (pop. 2000).

He was a nonsmoking nondrinking deacon of the Baptist church, an only son, who would have seemed destined to grow old happily, practicing law with his father.

But a Clarence Darrow in the courtroom he was not, and six years later, he departed for Washington, where he showed an instinctive ability to finger the pressure points that make things happen in government and politics.

Indeed, his reputation as a trouble-shooter carried him straight into the White House and the vortex of the Watergate crisis when President Nixon decided he had to have a full-time lawyer on the case.

But now, five months after he began fighting the White House battle over secret presidential tape recordings, it appears that Buzhardt himself may become a victim in the struggle.

Two things have produced suspicion that Buzhardt may be on his way down or out: the appearance of another attorney in the office and a comment by Ronald Ziegler that White House lawyers have made mistakes.

Until he came into the Watergate spotlight, Buzhardt managed to move in and around some of the country's hottest controversies without attracting much attention to himself.

Some, who detest his politics, consider him a right-wing ideologue. During Cold War days, he was a top aide to Senator J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, an old family friend whose father taught law to Buzhardt's father. (Thurmond switched from the Democratic party to the GOP in 1964.)

Buzhardt, behind the scenes, was in the thick of the fight when Thurmond battled with the Pentagon and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara over the "muzzling" of military officers and the tempering of

A Lawyer Who Relishes Intrigue

for and about
people

the services' patriotic indoctrination programs.

Buzhardt left Thurmond's staff in 1966 and returned to McCormick to take over the law firm after his father's death, but he was back in Washington in early 1969 as a consultant to the defense department, and shortly afterward as a special assistant to Robert Froehlke, an assistant secretary of defense.

He later served as the Pentagon liaison with a blue-ribbon panel of private citizens who did a mammoth year-long study of the defense department. In August, 1970, he was named general counsel, the chief legal officer for the department.

Buzhardt's career at the Pentagon started on the recommendation of William J. Baroody Jr., who was a special assistant to then Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird.

Baroody, who had worked for Laird when the defense secretary was in congress, remembered Buzhardt as an unusually capable staff man



"The epitome of honesty" is how Gilbert W. Fitzhugh, above left, retired chairman of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, described Buzhardt; while the lawyer was a top aide to Senator Strom Thurmond, above right

Robert F. Froehlke: "When I needed good advice, Fred Buzhardt was the guy I went to"

when he worked on military matters for Thurmond, a member of the Senate armed services committee.

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Apparently he understands the functioning of the defense department like few other people inside it or out.

Froehlke, who left the Pentagon to return to the insurance business after serving as secretary of the Army, said recently, "When I needed good advice, Fred Buzhardt was the guy I went to. If he tells me something, I believe him."

But at the same time, Froehlke said he found Buzhardt something of a pessimist. "He's a bit gloomy; he can always see terrible things coming down the road."

Gilbert W. Fitzhugh, retired chairman of Metropolitan Life Insurance Com-

pany, who headed the blue-ribbon defense study, said he considers Buzhardt "entirely reliable . . . the epitome of honesty."

From the time he reached the Pentagon, Buzhardt found himself with one thorny problem after another — the handling of cases resulting from the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, the leak of the Pentagon Papers, a congressional investigation of Army spying on civilians.

He tangled with Senator Sam J. Ervin (Dem-N.C.), later chairman of the Senate Watergate investigation, when he refused to allow several generals to testify at an Ervin investigation into Army spying activities.

While he served officially as general counsel for the defense department, Pentagon sources say Buzhardt was actually the chief trouble-shooter for Laird.

According to some sources, Laird wanted to elevate Buzhardt to deputy secretary of defense, filling a newly created job recommended by the Fitzhugh panel.

That job has never been filled; Buzhardt continues officially in his old post as the defense department's general counsel, though he has been in the White House since June.

The day before Ziegler's oblique criticism of Buzhardt's handling of the Watergate case at the White House, Harry Dent, an old Buzhardt friend and compatriot from the Thurmond staff days, predicted Buzhardt would not go back to his old Pentagon post.

"Fred Buzhardt will stay there at the White House or move on to a more crucial position," Dent said.

Harry Dent compared Buzhardt to Thomas Jefferson

"He'll stay there, and he'll fight.

Dent, former White House political expert and one of the architects of President Nixon's Southern strategy, acknowledges Buzhardt might have once been a little over-enthusiastic in his conservatism.

"At one time, because of his firm convictions, he might have gotten his feet a little off the ground," said Dent. "I have watched him become more and more pragmatic; his feet have become very fastened to the ground."

In the next breath, Dent compared Buzhardt to Thomas Jefferson, then, on further reflection, he called Buzhardt an intellectual-philosophical mirror image of Supreme Court Justice William H. Rehnquist.

"He would have been a great director of the CIA" (Central Intelligence Agency), Dent added. "He does like intrigue."