

John L. McLucas

July 19, 1973–November 12, 1975



Portrait by Everett Raymond Kinstler



JOHN L. McLUCAS was born on August 22, 1920, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He attended schools in South Carolina and graduated in 1937 from Latta High School. Returning to North Carolina, he graduated from Davidson College in 1941 with a bachelor of science degree in physics. In 1943 he received a master of science degree in physics from Tulane University and in 1950 a doctorate in physics with a minor in electrical engineering from Pennsylvania State University. During World War II, McLucas served as an officer in the U.S. Navy, including a two-year stint at sea in the Pacific theater as a radar and operations officer.

In 1950 he joined the electronics firm of Haller, Raymond, and Brown, Inc., as its vice president and technical director. There he was responsible for all technical work of the company, including forward planning, supervision of technical personnel, proposal preparation, research, development, and manufacturing. When the firm merged with the Singer Company in 1958 to form a subsidiary, HRB-Singer, Inc., McLucas became its president. The new ancillary company specialized in military electronic systems. In the twelve years he was affiliated with HRB-Singer, McLucas increased the number of engineers from ten in 1950 to several hundred in 1962.

In 1962 he went to work in the Pentagon as a deputy to Harold Brown, the director of Defense Research and Engineering. It was McLucas's job to oversee development of tactical systems of the three services and the Advanced Research Projects Agency. As head of an office called Tactical Warfare, McLucas spent much of his time with Air Force secretariat officials—Secretary of the Air Force Eugene Zuckert and Undersecretaries of the Air Force Brockway McMillan and Joseph Charyk—and their military counterparts—Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis LeMay, and Generals Jim Ferguson, “Spike” Momyer, and “Bennie” Schriever. In addition, his job entailed liaison with principal agencies of the military departments and laboratories, daily contacts with industry, and visits to industrial and military installations. Frequent contacts with press, other government agencies, and groups like the president's Scientific Advisory Committee and the Defense Science Board also marked his schedule.

In July 1964 McLucas went to Paris to work for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as assistant secretary general for scientific affairs and as chair of the NATO science

committee and of the defense research directors' committee. He was responsible to the NATO secretary general for the administration of NATO programs in the fields of pure science and defense science. One of his jobs was to head a committee of defense directors from all NATO countries who were dealing with the development of common weapons for use by the NATO allies in case of war in Europe. He also maintained contacts with ministries of foreign affairs, science, and defense, and with NATO delegations to develop common points of view on science and defense matters.

In 1966 he returned to the United States to become president and chief executive officer of the MITRE Corporation in Bedford, Massachusetts. MITRE, a nonprofit corporation, that was organized by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the request of the United States Air Force (USAF) in 1958 to assist in procuring and installing the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment defense system. In 1969 McLucas oversaw a MITRE budget of \$42 million, of which 65 percent was affiliated with the Air Force. While at MITRE McLucas also chaired the USAF Scientific Advisory Board ad hoc panel on infiltration interdiction in 1967–68; the Defense Science Board summer study on tactical aircraft in the summer of 1968; and the Defense Science Board Task Force on Management of Military Research and Development in 1968–69.

In 1969 Secretary of the Air Force Robert C. Seamans, Jr., asked McLucas to become his undersecretary. McLucas took the job not only because he respected Seamans as an exceptional engineer and manager, but also because he considered Seamans to be a “decent human being” and a person he was delighted to call his friend. Seamans wanted a true deputy, someone who would take charge and make decisions in his absence. In this work as undersecretary, McLucas concentrated on electronics fields, such as satellite communications, fire control, and electronic warfare, whereas Seamans served as the lead on such weapon systems as new airplanes. As undersecretary of the Air Force, McLucas also headed the National Reconnaissance Office. He supported the Nixon administration's policy of reducing U.S. involvement in the war in Southeast Asia, which moved too slowly for the public's taste. Seamans and McLucas wrestled with the problems of maintaining an effective military force when the military was unpopular at home and Soviet power and influence were expanding abroad. It was a time of decreasing military budgets, rapidly shrinking levels of manpower, and major reductions in the active forces. Procurements shrank to as little as 10 percent of the number of airplanes bought during the big defense buildup.

McLucas became secretary of the Air Force in July 1973, just after the United States had left Vietnam. He perceived his job as salvaging the service from the wreckage caused by the loss of equipment and a dampened morale, and dealing with the realities of what the Air Force had always believed—if there was a job to be done, the Air Force could do it. McLucas felt his task was to rekindle the esprit de corps and simultaneously start a few new projects. The YF-16/YF-17 flyoff and the Air Force selection and subsequent sale to NATO of the F-16

were highlights of his tenure. He also strongly supported prototyping to avoid the huge blunders that were made with the C-5A and the FB-111. Fortunately for him, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Undersecretary of Defense David Packard, and Bob Seamans shared his views.

McLucas had enjoyed a good relationship with Melvin Laird and had the utmost respect for his management practices, particularly his penchant for holding weekly meetings with the three service secretaries, during which he encouraged open discussions and reported about his activities on the Hill. Such was not the management style of Laird's successors Elliot L. Richardson and James R. Schlesinger. During his six-year tenure, McLucas' aggressive support of weapons systems' modernization produced a new array of aircraft—the F-15, AWACS (E-3A), A-10, F-5E, and F-16.

After leaving the Air Force in November 1975, McLucas became the administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, where he remained for two years. From 1977 to 1985 he served as executive vice president of COMSAT, president of COMSAT General, and president of COMSAT World Systems.

McLucas has been active on the boards of directors of private and pro bono organizations and as a consultant to several similar groups. In 1991 he authored *Space Commerce*, which was published by Harvard University Press.