Kudos For General Dan "SDI" Graham

January 18, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

Can one person really make a difference in this country of 250,000,000 people? The life of General Daniel O. Graham, who passed away on New Year's Eve, gives a stunningly affirmative answer.

Dan Graham, whose first love was the cavalry, liked to quote an old proverb. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe, the horse was lost; for want of the horse, the battle was lost.

That proverb defines his place in history. For want of Dan Graham, Ronald Reagan would not have had the vision of a defense against ballistic missiles called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI); for want of Reagan's leadership, the United States would not have had a project called SDI; and for want of the SDI project and the threat of what it could do, the Cold War would have been lost.

It is now clear that we won the Cold War when Mikhail Gorbachev reluctantly concluded that he couldn't talk Reagan out of SDI (at Geneva or elsewhere), and that the miserable Soviet economy couldn't match U.S. expenditures for building a nuclear defense. When Reagan called on Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall, the media laughed; but SDI turned that "pie-in-the-sky" prediction into reality.

The Democratic-controlled Congresses never voted the funds to deploy SDI, but they did tolerate limited funding for research and development. Fortunately that (combined with the collapsing Soviet economy) turned out to be enough to checkmate Gorbachev.

General Graham had a much-decorated 30-year military career that included service in Germany, Korea and Vietnam and was capped by serving as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. In retirement, he rejected lucrative offers from defense contractors and dedicated his life to American national defense.

As Ronald Reagan's military adviser in his 1976 and 1980 campaigns, Dan Graham laid out for his candidate the folly and culpable negligence of the Federal Government's leaving America totally undefended against incoming nuclear missiles. Graham's coaching led Ronald Reagan to articulate the crucial question on March 23, 1983: "Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?"

America's national grand strategy, developed by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in the early

1960s, was still in 1983 totally based on killing Russians instead of on protecting the lives of Americans. This strategy, called Mutual Assured Destruction, was known by its appropriate acronym MAD.

This theory proclaimed the notion that the way to avoid nuclear war was (a) not to build any defensive weapons, but instead (b) to threaten the Soviets that, if they fired their nuclear missiles at us, we would retaliate with our offensive nukes and kill tens of millions of Russians. If this scenario ever took place, tens of millions of Americans would die because our government had done nothing at all to protect them.

MAD was a suicide pact -- a strategy of revenge, rather than defense. Dan Graham said there must be a better way.

The better way developed by Graham was originally called High Frontier (because space is the high frontier of America's future), and was later called SDI. It is a plan for a layered defense, in which non-nuclear weapons shot from satellites in space and from ground bases in this country would destroy enemy nuclear missiles in flight before they incinerated Americans.

Dan Graham had the vision that a defense was both essential and doable, he was the salesman who persuaded Ronald Reagan and other public officials and opinion makers that it was sound political and military strategy, he assembled the scientists and engineers who proved it would work, he raised the funds to do all of the above, and he was a veritable machine grinding out refutations of the attacks launched on High Frontier/SDI by those determined to mislead the public with deceptive criticisms.

General Graham had to fend off the Ted Kennedy claque who tried to ridicule High Frontier as "Star Wars," and the liberal Democrats who are viscerally opposed to spending any money on defense. Graham had to withstand opposition from Paul Nitze and the internationalists who opposed SDI because they sought nuclear disarmament through international agencies, and from the arms control lobby, which had a vested interest in continuing their jobs attending international meetings where they tilted about arcane nuclear weapons statistics.

A couple of weeks ago, President Clinton vetoed the defense authorization which funded SDI, claiming that it is "on a collision course with the ABM treaty." That document is a relic of the Cold War, which continues to impose MAD on us and restricts our constitutional right to "provide for the common defense."

The nuclear threat today is from attacks by the several rogue nations that now possess ballistic missiles.

The ABM treaty cannot protect us against them, but SDI can.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." General Daniel O. Graham had the vision for a "Defense that Defends." As a fitting tribute to a great patriot, let us work to make it a reality.