

OBITUARIES

Edward Rowny, Outspoken Treaty Negotiator, Dies at 100

By NEIL GENZLINGER DEC. 21, 2017

Edward L. Rowny, a lieutenant general who advised presidents of both parties during arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, repeatedly raising warnings about the Russians and arguing that American proposals were too soft, died on Sunday in Washington. He was 100.

His son Michael said the cause was cardiomyopathy, a heart disease.

After serving in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam, General Rowny was named a negotiator in the talks that resulted in the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty signed in 1972 by President Richard M. Nixon and the Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev.

He was also a principal player in the next round of SALT negotiations. But when that agreement was put forward in 1979, he objected to it so strongly that he resigned from the Army after President Jimmy Carter signed it so that he could be free to speak against it. Which he did.

“The emerging treaty,” General Rowny said in typically uncompromising language, “is not in our interest since it is inequitable, unverifiable, undermines deterrence, contributes to instability and could adversely affect NATO security and Allied coherence.”

The second SALT was never ratified by the United States Senate, partly because later in 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

General Rowny may not have liked what President Carter came up with, but time would show that he was an equal-opportunity disdainer.

In 1987, this time as an adviser to a Republican president, Ronald Reagan, on the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (known as Start), he wrote in a newspaper opinion article that negotiations over nuclear missiles should also include the issue of the Soviets’ superiority in conventional forces.

The article drew a carefully worded but unmistakable rebuke from the White House.

“I think it is fair to say that there are people who are somewhat upset about it and would rather he didn’t make those comments,” Reagan’s spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said.

Edward Leon Rowny was born on April 3, 1917, in Baltimore. His father, Gracyan, an

immigrant from Poland, was a carpenter and contractor. His mother, the former Mary Radziszewski, was in poor health for much of his childhood, and he was raised largely by a grandmother.

After receiving a degree in civil engineering from Johns Hopkins University in 1937, he entered West Point. He took a particular liking there to the study of world history and was a member of the debating team, two interests that would serve him well later.

By the time he graduated in 1941 as a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, World War II was underway in Europe, and soon the United States was drawn in. His war service included assignments in Africa and Italy.

After the war he worked in strategic planning — examining, among other things, what the postwar Army should look like. He also found time to attend Yale, receiving master's degrees in 1949 in international relations and civil engineering.

He was then assigned to the Far East as a planning officer. When the Korean War came, he helped plan the Inchon landing in 1950 and then played a number of other roles in that conflict, including commanding an infantry regiment. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1961.

General Rowny had some ideas on how the Army might better use helicopters, and in 1962 he was sent to South Vietnam, where American involvement was increasing, to test them out. But he was not there long. In 1963 he was recalled to the United States and began a series of postings that led to his role in the arms-control talks.

An unwavering advocate of the peace-through-strength concept, General Rowny was regarded, in various quarters, as either an obstacle to compromise or a vital line of defense against Soviet manipulation. Whatever the reality, presidents kept making use of his services. After the 1979 blowup, he advised Reagan and then his successor, President George H. W. Bush.

“Mr. Reagan appointed him as top arms negotiator, prizing his resistance to seeking agreement for agreement's sake,” *The New York Times* wrote in 1987 as General Rowny was becoming more vocal in his opposition to the direction Reagan was taking. “The president got just what he asked for. As an agreement on European missiles nears, it seems to have lit the fuse on the Rowny time bomb with which Mr. Reagan booby-trapped his own team.”

General Rowny retired in 1990, the year before the first START treaty was signed. He went on to write several books about his experiences, even, his son said, after he lost his eyesight some 20 years ago.

He also continued a hobby that his son said he had begun as a boy, when, as a prize for winning a contest selling newspapers, he received a harmonica. He had been playing ever since, including, sometimes, for the Soviets he was facing at the negotiating table.

“He made his first YouTube video at the age of 94 playing the harmonica,” Michael Rowny said — the first of several.

General Rowny's first wife, the former Mary Rita Leyko, whom he married in 1941, died in 1988. He lived in Washington.

In addition to Michael, his son from that marriage, he is survived by his wife, the former Elizabeth Ladd, whom he married in 1994; his daughter, Marcia Jordan, and his sons Peter, Paul and Grayson, all also from his first marriage; two stepchildren, Jon Ladd and Lyssa Ladd; 10 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

In addition to the military ranks he accrued over the years, General Rowny had the title of ambassador, something he was given when Reagan named him chief arms negotiator in the early

1980s. His book "Smokey Joe and the General," a partial autobiography published in 2013, includes this anecdote:

"After swearing me in, President Reagan asked me, 'Do I now address you as ambassador or general?'

" 'Sir, it took me 20 years to become a general,' I said, 'and only 20 minutes to become an ambassador.'

"The president stood up, saluted sharply, smiled and said, 'Yes, sir, General.' "