THEY WILL NEVER FORGET:

Donald F. McHenry

Now a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., he helped develop a clout with the Third World nations that was the envy of the Soviet bloc.

Donald F. McHenry

By Rafat Habib

Although he is gone from the gray - flannel corridors of the United Nations building in New York City, the officials there still reminisce about Donald F. McHenry. Among the veteran reporters covering the U.N., his name still inspires fondness mingled with respect. Long-time practitioners and observers of diplomacy remain awed by the talents McHenry displayed during his relatively short tenure as the United States chief delegate to the U.N.

The arrival of the Reagan administration last Jan. 20 ended Mr. McHenry's career at the U.N. Since then he has been named a research professor of diplomacy at Georgetown University in Washington.

McHenry's departure from the field of international diplomacy has set back the humanist causes, including human rights, the Carter administration epoused. McHenry and his more famous predecessor, Andrew Young, were popular figures among the delegates from the developing nations who have been playing philosophies gibed with the views of the poor - nation delegations. The result was that the United States developed a clout with the third world that became the envy of the Soviet Union.

McHenry's rise to the chief delegate's post was one of those strange twists of fate that sometimes causes the ascendancy of talented but obscure men. In mid - 1979, Andy Young negotiated with a Palestine Liberation Organization representative.

When news of that meeting appeared in the media, Young denied that the meeting had ever taken place. He later had to admit that his denial was incorrect. Because candidate Jimmy Carter had told the nation, "I will not lie to you," Young's lie made his resignation inevitable.

On the advice of Young, among others, President Carter then plucked from relative obscurity McHenry, then the No. 3 man in the delegation, and appointed him chief delegate.

Donald F. McHenry was born Oct. 13, 1936 in St. Louis. His parents then lived across the river in East St. Louis but since the hospitals in that town were closed to blacks his mother had to travel to St. Louis when the time for his birth approached.

The family was poor and his father left when McHenry was a little boy. Food was scarce and the family was sometimes broke. McHenry's mother, however, was a strict disciplinarian who insisted on providing him with the best education.

The civil - rights struggles of the 1960s affected the former ambassador. He quietly persuaded the dean at the Illinois State University, which he attended, to integrate the dormitories.

Adlai Stevenson had long been his idol. Stevenson, who in the 1960s was the chief U.S. delegate to the U.N., was then looking for young blacks to add to the State Department staff. Harlan Cleveland, a Stevenson aide, recruited McHenry for the department.

For the next eight years, McHenry worked at the department. His projects included a proposal for Namibia's independence and a recommendation for greater self - rule to the residents of Micronesia (U.S. Trust Islands in the Pacific). His patient and detailed work won State Department awards and brought him closer to William P. Rogers, then Secretary of State.

During the Nixon years, he was riled by the phone tapping of several of his colleagues and the Cambodian bombing. Many of his co - workers angrily denounced the Nixon administration and quit. McHenry decided that that was not his style. "I don't believe in confrontation politics," he says. He resigned without a bang.

He remained a respected figure in foreign - policy circles, working quietly to make his views known. He wrote a book, "Micronesia: Trust Betrayed," and lectured at highly - regarded institutions. He returned to the State Department when the Democrats returned in 1976.

Several pro - Israel and Zionist groups called Andy Young "racist" after details of his meeting with a P.L.O. envoy became known. The flamboyant and outspoken Young left, to be succeeded by the quiet and cautious McHenry.

The contrast was so sharp that a New York Times writer called the new delegate "the man nobody knows." McHenry's cool, professional skills earned him the respect of not only the Third World but the developed countries as well.

The former ambassador to the United Nations remains the reticent and retiring man he was at the U.N. Asked by an interviewer what his middle initial, F. stands for, he said, "That is a trade secret."

A partial explanation for the McHenry formula was provided by his former wife, Mary, an associate dean at Mount Holyoke College who is also an English teacher. She said, "We are a very private people. All of us who grew up in the 40s, 50s and 60s had very little opportunity to be ourselves. Think about what that meant. You didn't have the chance to fail, the luxury of a misstep. We didn't have the bonding experience. It was loneliness."

That isolation plus McHenry's early poverty may have helped to strengthen his self - reliance. People at the U.N. who watched him closely say that he seems incapable of spontaneity. He was never known to put his arms around other diplomats. An Asian diplomat said, "He lacks warmth, amiability." However, in diplomacy where today's bosom buddies can become tomorrow's worst enemies, McHenry's tactiturnity is a highly desirable trait.

He participates in no sports and

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