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# THAT MOTHERFUCKER

— THE LIFE & RECORD OF —

## DONALD H. RUMSFELD

*The only man to run the Pentagon twice — the youngest, then the oldest — and the one who steered it straight into the worst foreign-policy catastrophe of his generation. A documented life, told without the courtesy of an obituary.*

UNCLASSIFIED  
OSINT

MARIE LANDRY'S SPY SHOP

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EYES OPEN

SUBJECT: RUMSFELD, DONALD H.  
B. 09 JUL 1932 — D. 29 JUN 2021  
RESEARCH DRAFT · FACT-CHECKED ED.

*"There are known knowns; there are things we know  
we know. We also know there are known  
unknowns... But there are also unknown unknowns  
— the ones we don't know we don't know."*

— DONALD RUMSFELD, PENTAGON BRIEFING, 12 FEBRUARY 2002

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# A NOTE ON THE TITLE, THE TONE, AND THE FOOTNOTES

READ THIS PART. IT IS THE ONLY APOLOGY YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK.

The title is a provocation, and it is meant to be. But the provocation is the only thing in these pages that is not load-bearing. Everything after it – every figure, every date, every quotation set in typewriter font inside an "Exhibit" box – is drawn from the public record: from the *9/11 Commission Report*, from sworn testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, from Pentagon press transcripts, from the casualty ledgers kept by Brown University's Costs of War project and Iraq Body Count, from declassified files held by the National Security Archive, and from the obituaries and reporting of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, NPR, the *Guardian*, *Slate*, and *The Atlantic*.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a neutral book. A neutral book about Donald Rumsfeld would be a lie of omission, because the central facts of his career are not neutral: a war sold on weapons that did not exist, an occupation planned by a man who fired the general who told him the truth about it, and a torture regime he signed off on with a handwritten complaint that the detainees weren't being made to stand long enough.<sup>2</sup> You can be fair to a man and still find him guilty. This book tries to be both.

Where the record is contested, it says so – out loud, in the margin, on a stamp. When a juicy story rests on a single secondary source, you will see a flag that reads **SOURCING: SECONDARY**. When something Rumsfeld's critics repeat turns out to be more complicated than the slogan, this book says that too. He has defenders – President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney chief among them – and

their case is given its hearing.<sup>3</sup> The point is not to cheat. The point is that the honest version is damning enough.

Donald Rumsfeld died at eighty-eight, in his own bed, in Taos, New Mexico, a wealthy and unprosecuted man. That, too, is part of the record. Let's begin there.

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# 00 THE MAN WHO WAS NEVER SORRY

*He had two faces and ran out of neither. The question this book asks is the one his obituaries dodged: how does a man do this much damage and walk away clean?*

**O**n the morning of June 30, 2021, the American press faced a small, revealing problem: how to write the obituary of a man whose life's work had killed somewhere on the order of several hundred thousand people, when the man himself had been so charming about it. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reached, by reflex, for the texture — the Princeton wrestling, the squash games, the businessman's turnaround of a pharmaceutical company, the "combative infighter" reputation — and were promptly taken to task by the Columbia Journalism Review for foregrounding the man's hobbies over the Iraqi dead.<sup>4</sup> Other outlets did not bother with the courtesy. *Slate*'s Fred Kaplan called his tenure as Secretary of

Defense "a catastrophe for America and the world."<sup>5</sup> The Atlantic's George Packer skipped the throat-clearing entirely.

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*"Rumsfeld was the worst secretary of defense in American history... worse than the closest contender, Robert McNamara."*

GEORGE PACKER, *THE ATLANTIC*, 30 JUNE 2021

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This is the central fact about Donald Henry Rumsfeld, and it is worth stating plainly before we go back and watch it happen in slow motion: he was very, very good at the thing he was bad at. He was bad at running the Department of Defense — bad in ways that got people killed by the tens of thousands — and he was world-class at not appearing to be. He could stand at a Pentagon podium, take a question about whether the United States had any idea where Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were, and deliver a riff on epistemology so quotable that people forgot to notice the weapons were never found.<sup>6</sup>

The shape of his life is almost too neat. He was the **only person in American history to serve twice as Secretary of Defense** — and he held the record at both ends, becoming the **youngest ever** to hold the post at forty-three under Gerald Ford, and the **oldest** to take it at seventy-four under George W. Bush.<sup>7</sup> Between those two tenures he spent a quarter-century getting rich in the private sector, shaking hands with a dictator the United States would later hang, and waiting. When the call came again, he was ready. That was the tragedy. He had spent twenty-four years sharpening the knife and had learned nothing

about where to point it.

He died of multiple myeloma at his home in Taos, surrounded by family, an unrepentant and unindicted man.<sup>8</sup> No senior American official has ever been held legally accountable for what was done in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> This book cannot fix that. It can only refuse to forget it. So let us start where every honest accounting of a powerful man should start – not with the catastrophe, but with the boy who would grow up certain he was right.

# 01 THE WRESTLER FROM WINNETKA

*Princeton, the Navy, and the invention of a man who would spend his life pinning opponents to the mat — sometimes literally.*

CHICAGO • NEW TRIER • PRINCETON • NAVAL AVIATION

**D**onald Henry Rumsfeld was born in Chicago on July 9, 1932, the son of George Donald Rumsfeld, a real-estate salesman of German descent, and Jeannette Husted Rumsfeld.<sup>10</sup> He grew up in Winnetka, one of the wealthy villages strung along Lake Michigan's North Shore above Chicago, and he was, from early on, the sort of compact, relentless boy who wins things. At New Trier High School he wrestled in the 145-pound class. He was good. Wrestling — the discipline of it, the leverage, the business of using an opponent's own weight to put him on his back — would turn out to be the most honest metaphor anyone ever found for him, and he found it himself, at fourteen.

He went to Princeton in 1950 on a combination of academic and Navy ROTC scholarships, because the family was not rich enough to send him otherwise.<sup>11</sup> A campus legend held that the young Rumsfeld would do one-armed push-ups for cash; years later, asked about it, he confirmed the legend and the reason — he needed the money.<sup>12</sup> At Princeton he captained the varsity wrestling team and the 150-pound football team, won an A.B. in politics in 1954, and wrote a senior thesis with a title that now reads like a man telling on himself decades early: *"The Steel Seizure Case of 1952 and Its Effect on Presidential Powers."* A study of how far a president can reach. He was twenty-one and already interested in the question that would define him.

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## ◆ THE AVIATOR AND THE MARRIAGE

On December 27, 1954, Rumsfeld married his high-school sweetheart, Marion Joyce Pierson. It would last more than sixty-six years, until his death.<sup>13</sup> They had three children — Valerie, Marcy, and a son, Nick. By the standards of the men he would later run with in Washington, the domestic life was conspicuously stable, and it mattered: Joyce was, by every account including his own, the steadying weight in a life otherwise organized around forward motion.

His ROTC obligation carried him into the Navy, where from 1954 to 1957 he served as a naval aviator and flight instructor.<sup>14</sup> He flew, he taught others to fly, and he won an all-Navy wrestling championship for good measure. He left active duty in 1957 but kept one foot in uniform for decades, drilling as a naval reservist and ultimately retiring as a Navy captain in 1989. The military was never abstract to Rumsfeld. He had flown the planes. This is part of why the men in uniform who later watched him mismanage their war found it so

galling: he was not a chickenhawk who had never served. He had served, and he still got it wrong, and he never once let the fact that he might be wrong slow him down.

**ON THE RECORD:** The wrestler's instinct — win the position, control the opponent, never concede the takedown — is not a literary flourish imposed after the fact. Rumsfeld himself reached for it again and again across his career, and his admirers and critics alike used it to describe him. Keep it in mind. We will watch him try to wrestle the United States Army, the Geneva Conventions, and the entire continent of Europe.

# 02 THE YOUNG MAN IN A HURRY

*Thirty years old and already in Congress, he learned the one skill that would carry him to the top and nearly bury the country: how to get ahead.*

CAPITOL HILL • A.G. BECKER • THE CLASS OF 1962

**R**umsfeld came to Washington in 1957 the way ambitious young men did then — as a staffer, carrying someone else's briefcase. He worked as an administrative assistant to an Ohio congressman, David Dennison, then briefly for Michigan's Robert Griffin, learning the machinery of the House from the inside.<sup>15</sup> Then he went home to Chicago and made money for a stretch as an investment broker with A.G. Becker & Co., from 1960 to 1962. He was a man assembling the standard kit: a little Washington, a little Wall Street, a young family, a name.

In 1962, at the age of thirty, he ran for the open U.S. House seat in

Illinois's 13th District – the affluent suburbs north of Chicago – and won.<sup>16</sup> He would be reelected three times, in 1964, 1966, and 1968, never seriously threatened; in 1966 he took 76 percent of the vote.<sup>17</sup> He arrived in the same broad cohort of restless, reform-minded Republicans that produced his lifelong friends and rivals: Bob Dole, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush.

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## ◆ A REFORMER'S RÉSUMÉ

The Rumsfeld of the 1960s is, for the purposes of this book, almost a different man – or rather, the same engine pointed somewhere more defensible. He voted for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He pressed for open government and freedom-of-information reforms. He supported the Vietnam War, as most of his party did, while opposing much of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society as federal overreach.<sup>18</sup> He cultivated the press, cultivated the image of the clean young modernizer, and – crucially – cultivated the impression among older men that he was going places and that it would be wise to bring him along.

That last skill was the real one. Rumsfeld's congressional record is unremarkable; his congressional *networking* was a masterpiece. He understood, earlier than almost anyone of his generation, that proximity to executive power beat seniority in the legislature. So in 1969, midway through his fourth term, when a newly elected President Richard Nixon came looking for fresh Republican talent, Rumsfeld did something his colleagues found slightly insane. He gave up a safe House seat – the thing most members spend their lives protecting – to take an administration job running an anti-poverty agency he didn't particularly believe in.<sup>19</sup> He resigned from Congress on May 25, 1969. He had read the board correctly. The action was in

the executive branch, and he meant to be in the action.

03

## NIXON'S SURVIVOR

*He hired Dick Cheney, ran Nixon's wage-and-price controls, and got himself shipped to Brussels at the precise moment Watergate began to burn. Luck? Or the best instinct in Washington?*

OEO • THE COST OF LIVING COUNCIL • NATO

**N**ixon made Rumsfeld director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1969 – the agency at the heart of Johnson's War on Poverty, which Rumsfeld was essentially hired to tame and shrink.<sup>20</sup> The job came with a Cabinet-rank title and a problem: Rumsfeld needed staff. Into his office, in answer to that need, walked a quiet, sharp, twice-flunked-out-of-Yale congressional fellow named Richard Bruce Cheney.

The interview has become legend. Cheney later told the story that Rumsfeld, unimpressed and impatient, essentially threw him out – "You, you're congressional relations. Now get the hell out of here" – and that Cheney spent the next decades as Rumsfeld's protégé, deputy,

successor, and finally his protector.<sup>21</sup> It is not too much to say that the entire trajectory of early-twenty-first-century American foreign policy began in that room, with an older ambitious man and a younger one recognizing something useful in each other. They would still be looking out for each other thirty-three years later, in a different war, from the two most powerful national-security chairs in the government.

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### ◆ **WAGES, PRICES, AND THE ART OF THE IMPOSSIBLE JOB**

Nixon kept moving Rumsfeld up and around: Counselor to the President, a seat in the Cabinet, and from 1971 the directorship of the Economic Stabilization Program – the Cost of Living Council – administering Nixon's extraordinary peacetime wage and price controls.<sup>22</sup> It was a thankless, near-impossible assignment, and Rumsfeld's reputation survived it intact, which in the Nixon White House was its own kind of achievement. He was learning the executive-branch craft at the feet of an administration that would shortly destroy itself.

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### ◆ **THE BRUSSELS EXIT**

Then came the move that tells you the most about Rumsfeld's political nose. In early 1973 – as the Watergate break-in metastasized from a "third-rate burglary" into the scandal that would consume the presidency – Nixon appointed Rumsfeld United States Ambassador to NATO, and Rumsfeld decamped to Brussels.<sup>23</sup> Whether by calculation or by luck, the timing was immaculate. While the men who had stayed close to Nixon were dragged one by one into the wreckage, Rumsfeld spent 1973 and 1974 an ocean away, conferring with allies about the

Atlantic alliance, his hands clean of the tapes, the cover-up, the obstruction. Nixon, for his part, never fully trusted Rumsfeld – the Nixon tapes and memoirs of the era paint a man the President found a little too ambitious, a little too obviously out for himself.<sup>24</sup> The distrust may have saved Rumsfeld's career. When the presidency collapsed in August 1974, he was untouched, abroad, and available.

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*Everyone who stayed close to Nixon was burned. Rumsfeld was in Brussels. He would spend the rest of his life being lucky in exactly this way – and calling it judgment.*

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# 04 THE HALLOWEEN MASSACRE

*In one weekend of 1975 he helped reshuffle the entire government, buried two rivals, installed his protégé, and made himself – at 43 – the youngest Secretary of Defense in history.*

CHIEF OF STAFF · THE RESHUFFLE · YOUNGEST SECDEF EVER

**G**erald Ford, suddenly president after Nixon's resignation, called his old friend home. Rumsfeld chaired the transition and then became White House Chief of Staff, where he installed his "spokes of the wheel" management system and brought Cheney in as his deputy.<sup>25</sup> Then came the weekend that made his name and announced, to anyone paying attention, exactly what kind of operator he was.

Over the late days of October and into November 1975, the Ford administration executed a sweeping shake-up that the press

immediately christened the "**Halloween Massacre.**" Defense Secretary James Schlesinger was fired. CIA Director William Colby was fired. Henry Kissinger was stripped of his dual hat as National Security Adviser, keeping only the State Department. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller was pushed off the 1976 ticket. George H.W. Bush was dispatched to run the CIA – a posting widely seen as a political dead end. And Donald Rumsfeld was named Secretary of Defense.<sup>26</sup> Cheney, then thirty-four, stepped into Rumsfeld's old job as the youngest White House Chief of Staff in history.

Many observers credited Rumsfeld with engineering the whole thing – and at least one furious colleague said so to the President's face. Nelson Rockefeller, freshly deep-sixed, delivered a warning to Ford that has aged into prophecy.

#### EXHIBIT A

"Rumsfeld wants to be president of the United States. He has given George Bush the deep six by putting him in the CIA, he has gotten me out ... I have to say I have a serious question about his loyalty to you."

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VICE PRESIDENT NELSON ROCKEFELLER, TO PRESIDENT GERALD FORD,  
1975 · PER SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE, "A HALLOWEEN MASSACRE AT THE  
WHITE HOUSE"

Whether Rumsfeld truly masterminded the massacre or merely benefited from it more than anyone else, the result was the same: two of his most serious rivals for the future of the Republican foreign-policy establishment – Kissinger, diminished; Bush, exiled to Langley

— had been neutralized, and Rumsfeld had the Pentagon. Declassified records would later show Kissinger, no slouch at bureaucratic knife-fighting himself, privately urging Ford to "smash" Rumsfeld.<sup>27</sup> The knives ran in both directions.

## ◆ THE YOUNGEST MAN EVER TO RUN THE PENTAGON

The Senate confirmed Rumsfeld on November 17, 1975, and at forty-three he became the **youngest Secretary of Defense in American**

**history**, a record that still stands.<sup>28</sup>

VOTE DISPUTED

**SOURCING NOTE:** Secondary accounts of the 1975 confirmation give the Senate vote as both 95–2 and 97–2. This book does not assert a number it cannot anchor to the Congressional Record. What is not in dispute is that he was confirmed comfortably and made history as the youngest person ever to hold the office.

In his first turn at the Pentagon, Rumsfeld did the things a hawkish Cold War defense secretary did. He fought to reverse a decade of shrinking post-Vietnam budgets. He nurtured the all-volunteer force. He pushed the weapons programs — the B-1 bomber, the Trident submarine, the cruise missile, the MX/Peacekeeper ICBM — that would define American hard power into the 1990s.<sup>29</sup> And through a now-infamous intelligence exercise known as "Team B," he amplified the argument that the CIA was systematically *underestimating* Soviet strength — a claim that conveniently undercut Kissinger's arms-control diplomacy at the SALT talks and that later scholarship judged to have substantially overstated the threat.<sup>30</sup> It was a preview, had anyone known to read it as one, of a method: when the intelligence is

inconvenient, find an alternative channel that produces the answer you already wanted.

Ford lost to Jimmy Carter in 1976. Rumsfeld received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 and, at forty-four, walked out of government and into the private sector with nothing left to prove and twenty-four years to wait. He had been to the mountaintop young. The question was what he would do with the rest of his life. The answer, it turned out, was: get rich, and bide his time.

# 05

## THE SALESMAN

*A pharmaceutical empire, an artificial sweetener the FDA didn't want to approve, a flu drug that made him richer during a pandemic scare, and a missile commission that helped lay the intellectual groundwork for the next war.*

G.D. SEARLE • ASPARTAME • GILEAD • GENERAL INSTRUMENT

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In 1977 Rumsfeld took over G.D. Searle & Company, a struggling pharmaceutical firm headquartered in Skokie, Illinois, and proceeded to demonstrate that the wrestler's instincts worked in a boardroom too.<sup>31</sup> He cut, he restructured, he turned the company around, and the business press rewarded him: he was named Outstanding Chief Executive Officer in the pharmaceutical industry by the *Wall Street Transcript* in 1980 and by *Financial World* in 1981. In 1985 he engineered Searle's sale to the chemical giant Monsanto.<sup>32</sup> By the time he left, Donald Rumsfeld was a wealthy man.

**SOURCING: SECONDARY.** A widely repeated figure holds that Rumsfeld pocketed a roughly \$12 million bonus when Monsanto absorbed Searle. The claim is real and frequently cited, but it traces to secondary reporting rather than a primary disclosure document, and this book flags it accordingly. The *Washington Post* did report the Monsanto tender offer at \$65 per share, announced July 18, 1985; the precise size of Rumsfeld's personal payout is less firmly documented than its retellings suggest.

## ◆ THE SWEETENER

Rumsfeld's signature business achievement, and his most enduring private-sector controversy, was getting aspartame to market. Searle had discovered the artificial sweetener years earlier, but the Food and Drug Administration had refused to approve it amid evidence of laboratory irregularities and unresolved questions about brain tumors in animal studies. In 1980 an FDA Public Board of Inquiry actually recommended *against* approval until the tumor data could be cleared up.<sup>33</sup> The product was stuck.

According to a person who attended a Searle sales meeting in early 1981, Rumsfeld told the room that he would, if necessary, "call in his markers" to get aspartame approved by the end of the year.<sup>34</sup> He had a marker to call. As a member of Ronald Reagan's 1980 transition team, Rumsfeld was positioned at the exact moment the incoming administration was choosing a new FDA commissioner. The administration installed Dr. Arthur Hull Hayes Jr. — a man with no particular background in food additives — and in July 1981 Hayes approved aspartame for use in dry foods, overruling the agency's own scientific review. Reporting on the episode describes Hayes effectively breaking a deadlocked scientific panel by appointing an additional member to it.<sup>35</sup> Hayes expanded the approval to soft drinks in 1983

and then, shortly afterward, left the FDA — for a consulting post with Searle's public-relations firm, Burson-Marsteller. He was not the only official involved in the approval to later turn up on the payroll of NutraSweet-affiliated business.<sup>36</sup>

The point here is not that aspartame is poison. The science on that has gone back and forth for forty years, and the most authoritative current word is carefully hedged.

#### EXHIBIT B

Aspartame is "possibly carcinogenic to humans (Group 2B) on the basis of limited evidence for cancer in humans (specifically, for hepatocellular carcinoma)."

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION / IARC, 14 JULY 2023. THE JOINT FAO/WHO EXPERT COMMITTEE (JECFA) SIMULTANEOUSLY REAFFIRMED AN ACCEPTABLE DAILY INTAKE OF 40 MG PER KILOGRAM OF BODY WEIGHT.

The point is the *method*: a regulatory obstacle, a well-placed appointment, a scientific objection steamrolled by an administrator who then collected a private-sector reward. It is the Team B move again, transposed from the Cold War to the candy aisle. When the experts say no, change the people who get to say it.

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## ◆ THE FLU DRUG

Rumsfeld's other businesses kept the pattern of a man who moved through the commanding heights. He was chairman and CEO of General Instrument from 1990 to 1993, a leader in broadband and

cable technology, and he chaired the RAND Corporation.<sup>37</sup> Most consequentially for his later reputation, he sat on the board of Gilead Sciences from 1988 and served as its chairman from 1997 until he returned to government in 2001. Gilead had invented the antiviral drug that became Tamiflu and licensed it to the Swiss firm Roche.<sup>38</sup>

Rumsfeld held onto a substantial Gilead stake when he became Secretary of Defense – reported at somewhere between \$5 million and \$25 million.<sup>39</sup> Then, in 2005, the avian-flu scare hit, governments around the world rushed to stockpile Tamiflu, and the value of Gilead shares – and of the Defense Secretary's holdings in them – climbed sharply. Rumsfeld recused himself from government decisions involving Gilead and was not required by ethics officials to divest, and there is no evidence he steered policy to enrich himself. But the optics were exactly what they look like: the man running the Pentagon during a public-health panic stood to profit from the drug everyone was panic-buying.

CONFLICT NOTED

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## ◆ THE MISSILE COMMISSION

And in the late 1990s, Rumsfeld did the thing that kept his name in the national-security bloodstream during his years in exile: he chaired the 1998 Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States – the "Rumsfeld Commission."<sup>40</sup> Its July 1998 report warned, more alarmingly than the prevailing intelligence estimates, that rogue states such as North Korea, Iran, and Iraq could field intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of hitting the United States within roughly five years. The finding supercharged the missile-defense debate and burnished Rumsfeld's standing among hawks as a

man willing to see threats the cautious bureaucracy preferred to downplay.

It was during this commission, by his own account, that Rumsfeld began deploying the formulation he would later make world-famous — the taxonomy of "known knowns," "known unknowns," and "unknown unknowns," which he credited to the NASA administrator William Graham.<sup>41</sup> File that away. The phrase that would one day stand for the unknowability of Iraq's weapons was first sharpened, fittingly, on a commission designed to argue that the threats were worse than anyone admitted.

06

# THE HANDSHAKE

*Reagan sent him to Baghdad as a special envoy. Iraqi television caught him grinning and shaking the hand of Saddam Hussein — while the United States knew Iraq was gassing its enemies.*

**SPECIAL ENVOY · SADDAM HUSSEIN · THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR**

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In November 1983, President Ronald Reagan appointed the private citizen Donald Rumsfeld as his special Middle East envoy, and on December 20, 1983, Rumsfeld walked into a room in Baghdad and shook hands with Saddam Hussein.<sup>42</sup> Iraqi television filmed it. The footage — Rumsfeld smiling, Saddam gracious, the two men clasping hands like business partners — would resurface two decades later as the single most damning image of American hypocrisy in the entire Iraq saga, and Rumsfeld would spend years being asked about it.

The context is the part everyone forgets and no one should. In the early 1980s the United States wanted Iraq to win, or at least not lose, its grinding war against revolutionary Iran. Saddam was, in the cold

logic of the moment, the enemy of America's larger enemy. So Washington tilted toward Baghdad: restoring relations that had been severed since 1967, extending agricultural credits, and approving exports of dual-use technology.<sup>43</sup> Rumsfeld's mission was to grease that relationship. His ninety-minute meeting with Saddam was, by the standards of the day, a success.

Here is the rub. By the time Rumsfeld was shaking Saddam's hand, the United States already knew that Iraq was using chemical weapons against Iranian troops – and would soon use them against its own Kurdish citizens. Rumsfeld, by the declassified record, did not raise the chemical-weapons question directly with Saddam in that first meeting. Accounts indicate he mentioned it to the Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, and a *Newsweek* account holds that he cautioned that chemical-weapons use could "inhibit" American assistance – a remarkably soft word for the deliberate gassing of human beings.<sup>44</sup> He returned to Baghdad in March 1984. Full diplomatic relations were restored that November.

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*Twenty years before he sold a war on the premise that Saddam Hussein was a monster with weapons of mass destruction, Donald Rumsfeld shook the monster's hand – and knew about the weapons.*

THE BAGHDAD MEETINGS · DECEMBER 1983 & MARCH 1984

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None of this is a gotcha invented by Rumsfeld's enemies. The National

Security Archive at George Washington University assembled and published the declassified documentary record under the dry, devastating title *"Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein,"* and the photograph speaks for itself.<sup>45</sup> The man who, as Secretary of Defense, would invoke Saddam's chemical weapons as a casus belli had, as a private envoy, helped keep Saddam armed and diplomatically afloat at the precise moment those weapons were in use. He was not lying in 2003 when he said Saddam was a brutal gasser of innocents. He was simply not mentioning that he had once been in the room, smiling, when it didn't suit American interests to care.

# 07 THE RETURN

*At 74 he became the oldest Secretary of Defense ever. On September 10, 2001, he declared war on Pentagon waste. The next morning, the building was on fire — and within hours he was looking for a way to blame Iraq.*

TRANSFORMATION • \$2.3 TRILLION • 9/11

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**G**eorge W. Bush nominated him on December 28, 2000, and on January 20, 2001, Donald Rumsfeld was sworn in as Secretary of Defense for the second time, a quarter-century after the first. At seventy-four he was now the **oldest** person ever to take the job, having once been the youngest.<sup>46</sup> He came back with a mission and a chip on his shoulder. The mission was "transformation" — remaking the American military into something lighter, faster, more lethal, more technological, and less encrusted with Cold War bureaucracy and legacy hardware. The chip was his contempt for that bureaucracy, which he regarded as a bloated adversary to be defeated.

## ◆ THE \$2.3 TRILLION

On September 10, 2001, Rumsfeld stood before an audience at the Pentagon and declared war — not on a country, but on his own department's accounting.

### EXHIBIT C

"According to some estimates, we cannot track \$2.3 trillion in transactions."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, PENTAGON ADDRESS ON BUREAUCRATIC WASTE, 10  
SEPTEMBER 2001 — ONE DAY BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS.

The line was about antiquated, incompatible accounting systems — money the Pentagon could not properly *track*, not a literal pile of \$2.3 trillion that had been stolen.<sup>47</sup> But the timing was catastrophic for public understanding: the speech was buried by the next morning's horror and then exhumed, years later, by conspiracy theorists who turned a story about lousy bookkeeping into a story about vanished trillions. The honest version is damning enough without the fantasy. The Pentagon has never to this day passed a clean financial audit, and Rumsfeld's own department remained, on his watch and after it, fundamentally unaccountable for how it spent the public's money.<sup>48</sup>

## ◆ THE ELEVENTH OF SEPTEMBER

The next morning, at 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77 was flown into the western face of the Pentagon. To Rumsfeld's genuine and undeniable credit, his first instinct was physical courage: he went

out to the crash site, into the smoke and wreckage, and helped carry the wounded on stretchers before returning to the National Military Command Center to do his job.<sup>49</sup> Whatever else this book says about him, that morning he ran toward the fire. It should be said clearly, because it is true, and because what he did a few hours later is so much harder to forgive.

By midafternoon, Rumsfeld's mind had already traveled somewhere the evidence did not yet support. Notes taken that day by his aide Stephen Cambone – later quoted in the *9/11 Commission Report* and first reported by CBS News – capture the Secretary of Defense, hours after the attack, pressing his staff to find a justification for hitting Saddam Hussein, who had nothing to do with it.

#### EXHIBIT D

"Best info fast. Judge whether good enough hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] at same time. Not only UBL [Usama bin Laden]... Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not."

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NOTES OF AIDE STEPHEN CAMBONE RECORDING RUMSFELD, AFTERNOON OF  
11 SEPTEMBER 2001 · 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT, PP. 334-335; FIRST  
REPORTED BY CBS NEWS.

"Things related and not." Read it again. On the day nineteen hijackers – fifteen of them Saudi, none of them Iraqi, directed by a Saudi exile hiding in Afghanistan – murdered nearly three thousand people, the American Secretary of Defense was already reaching for the country he wanted to invade and instructing his staff to sweep up matters "related and not."<sup>50</sup> The war in Iraq was not a conclusion the Bush

administration was forced to over eighteen months of mounting evidence. For Rumsfeld, it was an impulse he had on the afternoon of the attack, and then spent a year and a half justifying. The rest of this book is the story of how he got away with it.

08

# THE WAR OF CHOICE

*"We know where they are." He stovepiped the intelligence, predicted a war of weeks, and destroyed the career of the one general who told the Senate how many troops it would really take.*

WMD • THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL PLANS • SHINSEKI

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**T**o get the war he had wanted since the afternoon of September 11, Rumsfeld needed two things: a threat the public would believe, and a plan small enough to sell as cheap and quick. He manufactured both, and both were lies — not always lies of fact, but lies of confidence, assertions of certainty about things he could not possibly know.

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## ◆ THE WEAPONS THAT WEREN'T

On the threat, Rumsfeld was categorical in a way the actual intelligence never justified. Asked on ABC's television program on March 30, 2003 — days into the invasion — where Iraq's weapons of

mass destruction were, he did not hedge.

#### EXHIBIT E

"We know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and north somewhat."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, ABC "THIS WEEK," 30 MARCH 2003, ON THE LOCATION OF IRAQI WMD. NONE WERE EVER FOUND.

They were not in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad, or anywhere else, because by then they did not exist. To keep the certainty flowing, Rumsfeld's policy shop under Undersecretary Douglas Feith ran an operation called the Office of Special Plans, which a later Pentagon Inspector General report found had "developed, produced, and then disseminated alternative intelligence assessments" on a supposed Iraq-al-Qaeda link that were inconsistent with the consensus of the actual intelligence community.<sup>51</sup> This is the Team B move a third time, now with a body count attached: build a parallel intelligence channel that produces the answer the boss has already decided on, and route it around the analysts who keep saying the answer is wrong.

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#### ◆ SIX DAYS, SIX WEEKS. I DOUBT SIX MONTHS.

On the plan, Rumsfeld's "transformation" gospel collided with reality and lost – except the bill came due not to him but to the troops and to Iraq. He wanted a small, fast, light invasion force that would vindicate his theories. He got it, and it conquered Baghdad in three weeks. He had been confident about the timeline:

*"It is unknowable how long that conflict will last. It could last six days, six weeks. I doubt six months."*

— RUMSFELD, 7 FEBRUARY 2003

The conventional war did last about that long. The occupation lasted nearly nine years and the consequences are still unspooling. The gap between those two facts is the whole indictment.

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## ◆ THE GENERAL WHO TOLD THE TRUTH

The clearest single illustration of Rumsfeld's method — and its human cost — is what he and his deputy did to General Eric Shinseki. On February 25, 2003, the Army Chief of Staff testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and was asked how many troops a postwar occupation of Iraq would require. He answered honestly: "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers."<sup>52</sup>

The response from Rumsfeld's Pentagon was swift and contemptuous. Two days later, on February 27, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told the House Budget Committee that Shinseki's estimate was "wildly off the mark." The next day, Rumsfeld himself called it "far off the mark."<sup>53</sup> Shinseki was marginalized for the remainder of his term — his successor had already been named, unusually early — and he retired on schedule in June 2003.

**DISPUTED FRAMING:** Rumsfeld's defenders insist Shinseki was not "fired," that his retirement came at the normal end of his term and that he left with full military honors. That is true. It is also true that he was publicly humiliated and sidelined for telling the Senate the truth, and that the early naming of his successor sent an unmistakable message to every other officer about the cost of candor. Both things happened. This book holds both.

And Shinseki was right. The occupation was catastrophically under-resourced. The looting, the insurgency, the collapse of order — all of it flowed in part from there being far too few boots on the ground to hold what the invasion had taken. In November 2006, with the war in ruins, the CENTCOM commander General John Abizaid testified before the same committee and said it in four words: "General Shinseki was right."<sup>54</sup> By then the man who had been right was three years retired, and the man who had been wrong was still, for a few more days, running the war.

# 09 STUFF HAPPENS

*Baghdad burned and looted, and the Secretary of Defense shrugged. "Freedom's untidy." It became the epitaph for an occupation no one had planned.*

THE LOOTING · "OLD EUROPE" · KNOWN KNOWNs · BODY COUNTS

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**W**hen Baghdad fell in April 2003, it did not transition into the grateful, orderly, self-governing democracy the war's salesmen had promised. It descended into looting. Ministries were stripped, the national museum was ransacked, hospitals were emptied of equipment, and the basic machinery of a functioning state was carried off in the night. The world watched, and at a Pentagon briefing on April 11, 2003, the Secretary of Defense was asked about the chaos. His answer became one of the most infamous things any American official said during the entire war.

#### EXHIBIT F

"Stuff happens... and it's untidy, and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things. They're also free to live their lives and do wonderful things, and that's what's going to happen here."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, PENTAGON BRIEFING ON THE LOOTING OF BAGHDAD, 11 APRIL 2003.

"Stuff happens." He even reached for nursery rhyme, mocking the alarmed press coverage as "Henny Penny – 'The sky is falling.'"<sup>55</sup> The phrase was so emblematic of the administration's blithe indifference to the consequences of its own war that the British playwright David Hare used it as the title of his 2004 docudrama about the road to Iraq.<sup>56</sup> What "stuff happens" actually announced was a refusal of responsibility dressed up as worldly philosophy: the looting was not an act of God. It was the predictable result of invading a country with far too few troops to secure it – exactly as Shinseki had warned, and exactly as Rumsfeld had sneered.

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#### ◆ OLD EUROPE

Rumsfeld's contempt was not reserved for the press. When France and Germany declined to join the invasion, he dismissed two of America's oldest allies with a wave of the hand at a Foreign Press Center briefing on January 22, 2003.

"You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's old Europe. If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the east."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, FOREIGN PRESS CENTER BRIEFING, 22 JANUARY 2003.

The remark detonated across the Atlantic. In Germany, "*altes Europa*" – old Europe – was named the country's word of the year for 2003.<sup>57</sup> It was vintage Rumsfeld: a line crafted for maximum quotability and minimum diplomacy, the verbal equivalent of a takedown, scoring the point and damaging the alliance in the same breath.

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## ◆ KNOWN KNOWNS

And it was in this period that Rumsfeld delivered the lines that would outlive everything else he ever said – the riff that won him, with grim irony, a "Foot in Mouth" award from Britain's Plain English Campaign and a permanent place in the dictionary of the era. Asked at a February 12, 2002 briefing about the absence of evidence linking Iraq to terrorist weapons, he said:

"There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don't know we don't know."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE NEWS BRIEFING, 12  
FEBRUARY 2002.

Linguists and philosophers pointed out, not unfairly, that the statement is actually coherent — a real if clumsy account of categories of ignorance. But in context it was something darker than nonsense. It was a Secretary of Defense, asked for evidence, responding with an elegant meditation on the impossibility of knowing things — while simultaneously assuring the public, with total confidence, that he knew Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The epistemology was a smokescreen. When pressed for proof, he philosophized about uncertainty; when selling the war, the uncertainty evaporated.

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## ◆ WE DON'T DO BODY COUNTS

As the occupation curdled into insurgency — a word Rumsfeld long resisted using — the dead began to mount on every side. Asked about enemy casualties, the Secretary of Defense reached for a phrase that, in a war justified by humanitarian concern for the Iraqi people, lands like a slap.

EXHIBIT I

"We don't do body counts on other people."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, IN A NOVEMBER 2003 TELEVISION INTERVIEW. [Exact  
broadcast/date to be confirmed against transcript.]

The United States, having killed an unknowable number of people in a war of choice, would not trouble itself to count them. It is the bookkeeper's evasion from the \$2.3 trillion speech, transposed onto human life: what we do not count, we are not accountable for. The independent counters would have to do the work themselves – and they did, as the final appendix of this book records.

# 10 THE PHOTOGRAPHS

*He approved the interrogation methods. He scrawled a complaint that the prisoners weren't standing long enough. Then the pictures came out — and he offered to resign twice. Bush said no, twice.*

**TORTURE MEMOS · "I STAND 8-10 HOURS A DAY" · HAMDAN**

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In April 2004 the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison reached the public, and the moral case for the war — already hollowed out by the missing weapons — collapsed into something worse than emptiness. American soldiers had photographed themselves smiling beside naked, hooded, leashed, and brutalized Iraqi prisoners. The images circled the globe. They did more damage to American standing than any single act of the war except the invasion itself.

Rumsfeld appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 7, 2004, and said the words accountability requires.

"These events occurred on my watch. As Secretary of Defense, I am accountable for them. I take full responsibility."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES  
COMMITTEE, 7 MAY 2004.

He took "full responsibility," and then took none. He did not resign — though he revealed the following year, in interviews including one with Larry King, that he had twice privately offered his resignation to President Bush over Abu Ghraib, and that Bush had refused both times.<sup>58</sup> "Full responsibility" in the Rumsfeld dialect meant standing at a podium and saying the phrase, not suffering any consequence for the thing.

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### ◆ THE HANDWRITTEN NOTE

And the abuse was not merely the work of a few bad apples on a night shift, as the administration first insisted. The interrogation regime had been authorized at the top. In a December 2002 memorandum — later rescinded under pressure — Rumsfeld personally approved a set of harsh interrogation techniques for detainees at Guantánamo Bay, including stress positions, hooding, forced nudity, and the use of dogs to induce fear.<sup>59</sup> On the memo authorizing detainees to be forced to stand for up to four hours, Rumsfeld scrawled a now-notorious handwritten note in the margin.

"However, I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?"

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DONALD RUMSFELD, HANDWRITTEN NOTE ON THE DECEMBER 2002  
INTERROGATION MEMO.

It is a small note, and it contains the whole man. The studied casualness — a busy executive's marginal quibble — applied to the question of how long a human being in a cage may be forced to stand against his will. The inability to distinguish his own choice to work standing up from a prisoner's coerced agony. A bipartisan Senate Armed Services Committee report concluded in 2008 that Rumsfeld's decisions were a direct cause of the detainee abuse that followed; his authorization, the report found, "conveyed the message that physical pressures and degradation were appropriate treatment."<sup>60</sup>

The legal architecture had been built to match. The Justice Department's "torture memos" — drafted principally by John Yoo and signed by Jay Bybee — twisted the law to define torture so narrowly as to permit almost anything short of organ failure.<sup>61</sup> The whole edifice was eventually rebuked by the Supreme Court in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* in 2006, which held that Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions applied to detainees after all — a ruling whose very caption bears Rumsfeld's name as the losing party.<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch warned that Rumsfeld himself could bear criminal liability for the treatment of specific detainees.<sup>63</sup> No charge was ever brought.

# 11 THE REVOLT

*The generals broke their silence and demanded he go. The voters delivered the verdict. The day after the midterms, Bush finally let him fall.*

SNOWFLAKES · THE REVOLT OF THE GENERALS · RESIGNATION

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**B**y 2006 the war was unmistakably lost on the terms it had been sold, and the institution Rumsfeld had spent five years bullying began, at last, to bite back. It started with the memos – the famous "snowflakes," the blizzard of short, peremptory notes Rumsfeld dictated to subordinates demanding answers, assigning tasks, second-guessing everyone. An estimated 59,000 pages of them would eventually be pried loose through the National Security Archive, and they reveal a Secretary of Defense who micromanaged relentlessly while grasping the actual war dimly.<sup>64</sup> On one Afghanistan memo he scrawled a single word that doubles as a verdict on his entire tenure: "Help!"

## ◆ THE REVOLT OF THE GENERALS

In the spring of 2006, a remarkable thing happened: retired American generals — men who had commanded in Iraq, men trained to defer to civilian authority — went public, one after another, to demand Rumsfeld's resignation. At least six, and eventually eight, joined what TIME dubbed the "Revolt of the Generals": Anthony Zinni, Paul Eaton, Gregory Newbold, John Batiste, Charles Swannack, and others.<sup>65</sup> Major General Charles Swannack put the charge as bluntly as a soldier can put it about his civilian chief.

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*His "arrogance is what will cause us to fail."*

MAJ. GEN. CHARLES SWANNACK (RET.), ON RUMSFELD, 2006

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Bush, loyal to a fault and unwilling to be seen bowing to pressure, dug in. "Secretary Rumsfeld's energetic and steady leadership is exactly what is needed," the President declared, and Vice President Cheney — Rumsfeld's protégé of nearly forty years — remained his most reliable shield inside the White House.<sup>66</sup> For a few more months, the wrestler held the position.

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## ◆ THE THUMPING

Then the voters spoke. On November 7, 2006, in midterm elections widely understood as a referendum on the Iraq War, Republicans lost control of both houses of Congress. The next day — November 8, 2006 — President Bush announced Donald Rumsfeld's departure, later

conceding that his party had taken a "thumping."<sup>67</sup> The man who had survived Watergate from Brussels, survived the Halloween Massacre by orchestrating it, and survived Abu Ghraib by offering resignations he knew would be refused, was finally out — not on principle, not over the torture or the missing weapons or the hundreds of thousands dead, but the morning after an election his war had lost.

Robert Gates replaced him in December 2006 and promptly began reversing his approach, embracing the troop "surge" Rumsfeld's light-footprint doctrine had resisted, and quietly burying the "Rumsfeld Doctrine" that had delivered a swift conquest and a ruinous occupation.<sup>68</sup> Even Rumsfeld's old friend John McCain rendered the professional verdict without flinching: Rumsfeld, he said, "will go down in history as one of the worst secretaries of defense in history."<sup>69</sup>

# 12 THE UNKNOWN KNOWN

*A bestselling memoir with no regrets. A documentary in which a filmmaker stared into him for thirty-three hours and found nothing behind the smile. A card-game app. And then, at 88, a quiet death and a clean escape.*

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN • ERROL MORRIS • TAOS • THE LEDGER

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**O**ut of government at last, Rumsfeld did what unaccountable men of his station do: he rehabilitated himself. In 2007 he and Joyce established the Rumsfeld Foundation to support public service and wounded veterans, and he took up a perch as a distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution.<sup>70</sup> In 2011 he published a doorstep memoir, *Known and Unknown*, which became a number-one bestseller and in which he defended the wars with a serenity that bordered on the surreal.



"Ridding the region of Saddam's brutal regime has created a more stable and secure world."

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DONALD RUMSFELD, *Known and Unknown* (2011).

A more stable and secure world. He wrote that as Iraq bled and the region churned toward the rise of the Islamic State out of the chaos his war had seeded. There is no evidence he ever doubted it.

### ◆ THIRTY-THREE HOURS OF NOTHING

In 2013 the documentary filmmaker Errol Morris – who had once turned a camera on Robert McNamara and extracted from him something like remorse in *The Fog of War* – tried to do the same with Rumsfeld in a film titled, inevitably, *The Unknown Known*.<sup>71</sup> Across roughly thirty-three hours of interviews, Morris probed and circled and pressed, and came away unnerved by what he had failed to find. Where McNamara had agonized, Rumsfeld grinned. Morris described his subject as unapologetic, unremorseful, and arrogant – "a soldier in the army of himself." Asked by Morris why he had even agreed to sit for the film, Rumsfeld gave an answer that is somehow both a joke and the truest thing he ever said on camera: "That is a vicious question. I'll be darned if I know."

He kept busy in the manner of a contented retiree. He published *Rumsfeld's Rules* in 2013, a collection of the management aphorisms he had jotted on note cards for decades. He wrote a fond book about Gerald Ford. In 2016, at eighty-three, he released a mobile app –

Churchill Solitaire, a fiendish two-deck card game he said Winston Churchill had favored and that a Belgian diplomat had taught him decades earlier.<sup>72</sup> In January 2021 he joined all ten living former secretaries of defense in signing an open letter warning against any military involvement in disputes over the presidential election — a final, faint flicker of institutional conscience from a man who had spent his career testing institutions to their breaking point.<sup>73</sup>

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## ◆ TAOS

Donald Rumsfeld died on June 29, 2021, of multiple myeloma, at his home in Taos, New Mexico. He was eighty-eight.<sup>74</sup> His family released a statement praising "the integrity he brought to a life dedicated to country." He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on August 24, 2021, with military honors. Bush eulogized him as "a faithful steward of our armed forces" and said the country was "safer and better off for his service."<sup>75</sup>

He died as he had lived: comfortable, certain, and free. He was never charged. He never apologized. The closest he came to reckoning was a vicious question from a documentary filmmaker, and he laughed it off. The reckoning, such as it is, has to be done by the rest of us, with the ledger he left behind. That ledger is in the appendices that follow. The numbers are large, and they are not his hobbies, and they are not his wrestling record. They are the dead.

*You can be fair to a man and still find him guilty. Donald Rumsfeld got the fairness he was due – every defender quoted, every dispute flagged – and the verdict held anyway.*

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# A IN HIS OWN WORDS

*The complete exhibit file. Every quotation dated; where a date is unconfirmed, it says so.*

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*"There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don't know we don't know."*

PENTAGON BRIEFING · 12 FEBRUARY 2002

*"Stuff happens... and it's untidy, and freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things."*

ON THE LOOTING OF BAGHDAD · 11 APRIL 2003

*"You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's old Europe."*

FOREIGN PRESS CENTER · 22 JANUARY 2003

*"We know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad."*

ON IRAQI WMD, ABC "THIS WEEK" · 30 MARCH 2003

*"It could last six days, six weeks. I doubt six months."*

ON THE COMING WAR IN IRAQ · 7 FEBRUARY 2003

*"We don't do body counts on other people."*

TELEVISION INTERVIEW · NOVEMBER 2003 [DATE TO BE CONFIRMED]

*"These events occurred on my watch. As Secretary of Defense, I am accountable for them. I take full responsibility."*

SENATE TESTIMONY ON ABU GHRAIB · 7 MAY 2004

*"However, I stand for 8–10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?"*

HANDWRITTEN NOTE ON THE INTERROGATION MEMO · DECEMBER 2002

*"Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not."*

CAMBONE NOTES · AFTERNOON OF 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

*"According to some estimates, we cannot track \$2.3 trillion in transactions."*

PENTAGON ADDRESS ON WASTE · 10 SEPTEMBER 2001

*"Ridding the region of Saddam's brutal regime has created a more stable and secure world."*

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN · 2011

*"That is a vicious question. I'll be darned if I know."*

TO ERROL MORRIS, ON WHY HE SAT FOR THE FILM · 2013

# B RUMSFELD'S RULES

*The aphorisms he collected for half a century and published in 2013.  
Read them as advice, or read them as confession.*

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For decades Rumsfeld jotted maxims on note cards, circulated them to colleagues, and finally published them as a book.<sup>76</sup> Selected entries, verbatim:

01 *"If you are not criticized, you may not be doing much."*

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02 *"Learn to say 'I don't know.' If used when appropriate, it will be often."*

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03 *"Look for what's missing. Many advisers can tell a president how to improve what's proposed... Few are able to see what isn't there."*

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04 *"If you are working from your inbox, you are working on other people's priorities."*

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05 *"Don't divide the world into 'them' and 'us.'"*

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06 *"The price of being close to the President is delivering bad news. You fail him if you don't tell him the truth."*

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Rule 2 was written by the man who told the public he knew exactly where Iraq's weapons were. Rule 3 was written by the man who did not see the insurgency coming. Rule 5 was written by the man who called it "old Europe." Rule 6 was written by the man who buried the general who delivered the bad news. A man's rules and a man's record are two different documents. This book has reproduced both. Compare them yourself.

# C THE HUMAN COST

*He said the United States doesn't do body counts. Other people did. Here is what the war he championed cost — in dollars, and in the dead.*

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**R**umsfeld predicted the Iraq war would cost under \$50 billion. The actual accounting — compiled not by the Pentagon he ran but by independent researchers — runs to figures of a different order of magnitude entirely. The two most authoritative ongoing tallies are the Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute and the Iraq Body Count database. Their findings, with the methodological caution they themselves insist upon:

◆ THE RECORD · BROWN UNIVERSITY, COSTS OF WAR PROJECT

**\$8T**

ESTIMATED U.S. BUDGETARY COST OF THE  
POST-9/11 WARS, IN CURRENT DOLLARS  
(SEPT. 2021 REPORT)

**~900K**

ESTIMATED DIRECT DEATHS IN THE  
MAJOR POST-9/11 WAR ZONES AT THAT  
TIME

**4.5-4.7M**

TOTAL DEATHS INCLUDING INDIRECT, PER  
THE PROJECT'S MAY 2023 UPDATE

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*The 2021 report stated the war on terror's cost "stands at \$8 trillion and 900,000 deaths." The 2023 update, "How Death Outlives War," found at least 940,000 direct deaths and an estimated 3.6–3.8 million indirect deaths across the post-9/11 war zones – not Iraq alone. The \$8 trillion figure includes some \$2.2 trillion in projected future care for veterans through 2050.*

◆ THE RECORD · IRAQ BODY COUNT

**187K-210K**

DOCUMENTED IRAQI CIVILIAN DEATHS  
FROM VIOLENCE (AS OF JUNE 2023)

**<\$50B**

RUMSFELD-ERA PREDICTION OF THE  
WAR'S TOTAL COST

**0**

SENIOR U.S. OFFICIALS EVER HELD  
LEGALLY ACCOUNTABLE

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*Iraq Body Count recorded roughly 187,000–210,000 documented civilian deaths from violence and cautions that "even our highest totals to date may be missing many civilian deaths" – these are a documented floor, not a complete count.*

**ON THE NUMBERS:** These figures are genuinely contested and methodology-dependent, and this book presents ranges rather than false precision. Iraq Body Count's total counts *documented* civilian deaths from violence in Iraq specifically — a deliberate floor. The Costs of War aggregates are broader: they span Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen and beyond, and they distinguish direct deaths from the far larger toll of indirect deaths from the destruction of health systems, infrastructure, and economies. No single number captures it. Every number is large. That is the point Rumsfeld's "we don't do body counts" was designed to keep you from feeling.

## ◆ THE ACCOUNTABILITY THAT NEVER CAME

Attempts to hold Rumsfeld legally responsible failed at every turn. The Center for Constitutional Rights and others filed war-crimes complaints against him in Germany in 2004 and 2006, invoking universal jurisdiction and naming Rumsfeld alongside other senior officials; German prosecutors declined to proceed.<sup>77</sup> Human Rights Watch argued he could bear command responsibility for detainee abuse. Amnesty International has noted that no senior U.S. official has ever faced justice for crimes committed in Iraq.<sup>78</sup> He died, as this book has said and will say once more because it is the only sentence that matters, unindicted and unrepentant.

# § NOTES & SOURCES

*The receipts. Where a claim rests on contested or secondary sourcing, the note says so.*

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This is a journalistic apparatus assembled from the public record, not a formal academic citation set; full URLs and page numbers should be confirmed against the original documents before any republication. Sources are grouped by note number and link back to the passage they support.

- <sup>1</sup> On the documentary basis for this book: the *9/11 Commission Report*; U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody* (2008); Department of Defense news-briefing transcripts; Brown University, Watson Institute, Costs of War project; Iraq Body Count database; the National Security Archive, George Washington University; and obituaries/reporting in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *NPR*, the *Guardian*, *Slate*, and *The Atlantic*. 
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- <sup>2</sup> Senate Armed Services Committee, *Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody* (2008); the December 2002 interrogation memorandum and Rumsfeld's marginal note are reproduced in that inquiry and widely published. 

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- <sup>3</sup> President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, statements on Rumsfeld's service, 2006 and 2021; see NPR and Seattle Times obituary coverage, 30 June 2021. 

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- <sup>4</sup> On the obituary controversy, see the Columbia Journalism Review's critique of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* obituaries, and the obituaries themselves, 30 June–1 July 2021. 

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- <sup>5</sup> Fred Kaplan, "Donald Rumsfeld's Stint as Secretary of Defense Was a Catastrophe for America and the World," *Slate*, July 2021. 

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- <sup>6</sup> George Packer, *The Atlantic*, 30 June 2021 ("the worst secretary of defense in American history... worse than the closest contender, Robert McNamara"). 

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- <sup>7</sup> On Rumsfeld as the only two-time Secretary of Defense and both the youngest and oldest to hold the office, see the U.S. Department of Defense historical record and standard biographical references (Encyclopedia.com; Wikipedia, "Donald Rumsfeld"). 

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- <sup>8</sup> On his death of multiple myeloma at Taos, New Mexico, 29 June 2021, age 88, see NPR, "Donald Rumsfeld, The Controversial Architect Of The Iraq War, Has Died," and Seattle Times, 30 June 2021. 

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- <sup>9</sup> Amnesty International and other human-rights organizations have repeatedly noted the absence of senior-official accountability for crimes connected to the Iraq war and detainee treatment. 

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- <sup>10</sup> Birth and family background: Encyclopedia.com, "Donald Harold Rumsfeld"; Notable Biographies; Rumsfeld Foundation biography. 

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- 11 New Trier High School, Princeton (A.B. politics, 1954) and NROTC scholarship: Encyclopedia.com; Rumsfeld Foundation; Wikipedia. 

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- 12 The one-armed push-ups anecdote and his confirmation that he needed the money are recounted in biographical profiles; see Encyclopedia.com and obituary features. 

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- 13 Marriage to Joyce Pierson, 27 December 1954; three children (Valerie, Marcy, Nick); marriage of 66+ years: Rumsfeld Foundation; obituaries, 30 June 2021. 

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- 14 Naval aviator and flight instructor, 1954–1957; reserve service and retirement as a Navy captain in 1989: Encyclopedia.com; Wikipedia; Rumsfeld Foundation. 

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- 15 Early Capitol Hill staff work for Reps. David Dennison and Robert Griffin, 1957–1959: U.S. Congress Biographical Directory; Encyclopedia.com. 

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- 16 Election to the U.S. House from Illinois's 13th district, 1962, at age 30: U.S. Congress Biographical Directory; Wikipedia. 

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- 17 Re-elections of 1964, 1966, 1968 and vote shares: U.S. Congress Biographical Directory. 

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- 18 Congressional positions, including support for the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Vietnam War and opposition to much of the Great Society: Encyclopedia.com; Wikipedia. 

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- 19 Resignation from Congress, 25 May 1969, to join the Nixon administration: U.S. Congress Biographical Directory; Encyclopedia.com. 

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Donald Rumsfeld was a public official who exercised enormous power over the lives and deaths of others. Scrutiny of that record is not cruelty. It is the minimum a democracy owes the dead.

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Subject: Rumsfeld, Donald Henry — b. 09 JUL 1932, Chicago, Illinois — d. 29 JUN 2021, Taos, New Mexico.