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MAN IN THE NEWS

A General Steps From the Shadows

By [ELISABETH BUMILLER](#) and [MARK MAZZETTI](#)

WASHINGTON — Lt. Gen. [Stanley A. McChrystal](#), the ascetic who is set to become the new top American commander in Afghanistan, usually eats just one meal a day, in the evening, to avoid sluggishness.

He is known for operating on a few hours' sleep and for running to and from work while listening to audio books on an iPod. In Iraq, where he oversaw secret commando operations for five years, former intelligence officials say that he had an encyclopedic, even obsessive, knowledge about the lives of terrorists, and that he pushed his ranks aggressively to kill as many of them as possible.

But General McChrystal has also moved easily from the dark world to the light. Fellow officers on the [Joint Chiefs of Staff](#), where he is director, and former colleagues at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) describe him as a warrior-scholar, comfortable with diplomats, politicians and the military man who would help promote him to his new job.

"He's lanky, smart, tough, a sneaky stealth soldier," said Maj. Gen. William Nash, a retired officer. "He's got all the Special Ops attributes, plus an intellect."

If General McChrystal is confirmed by the Senate, as expected, he will take over the post held by Gen. [David D. McKiernan](#), who was forced out on Monday. Obama administration officials have described the shakeup as a way to bring a bolder and more creative approach to the faltering war in Afghanistan.

Most of what General McChrystal has done over a 33-year career remains classified, including service between 2003 and 2008 as commander of the Joint [Special Operations Command](#), an elite unit so clandestine that the Pentagon for years refused to acknowledge its existence. But former [C.I.A.](#) officials say that General McChrystal was among those who, with the C.I.A., pushed hard for a secret joint operation in the tribal region of Pakistan in 2005 aimed at capturing or killing [Ayman al-Zawahri](#), [Osama bin Laden's](#) deputy.

Defense Secretary [Donald H. Rumsfeld](#) canceled the operation at the last minute, saying it was too risky and was based on what he considered questionable intelligence, a move that former intelligence officials say General McChrystal found maddening.

When General McChrystal took over the Joint Special Operations Command in 2003, he inherited an insular, shadowy commando force with a reputation for spurning partnerships with other military and intelligence organizations. But over the next five years he worked hard, his colleagues say, to build close relationships with the C.I.A. and the [F.B.I.](#) He won praise from C.I.A. officers, many of whom had stormy relationships

with commanders running the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“He knows intelligence, he knows covert action and he knows the value of partnerships,” said Henry Crumpton, who ran the C.I.A.’s covert war in Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks.

As head of the command, which oversees the elite Delta Force and units of the [Navy Seals](#), General McChrystal was based at Fort Bragg, N.C. But he spent much of his time in Iraq commanding secret missions. Most of his operations were conducted at night, but General McChrystal, described nearly universally as a driven workaholic, was up for most of the day as well. His wife and grown son remained back in the United States.

General McChrystal was born Aug. 14, 1954, into a military family. His father, Maj. Gen. Herbert J. McChrystal Jr., served in Germany during the American occupation after World War II and later at the Pentagon. General Stanley McChrystal was the fourth child in a family of five boys and one girl; all of them grew up to serve in the military or marry into it.

“They’re all pretty intense,” said Judy McChrystal, one of General McChrystal’s sisters-in-law, who is married to the eldest child, Herbert J. McChrystal III, a former chaplain at the [United States Military Academy](#) at West Point.

General McChrystal graduated from West Point in 1976 and spent the next three decades ascending through conventional and Special Operations command positions as well as taking postings at Harvard and the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a commander of a Green Beret team in 1979 and 1980, and he did several tours in the Army Rangers as a staff officer and a battalion commander, including service in the Persian Gulf war of 1991.

One blot on his otherwise impressive military record occurred in 2007, when a Pentagon investigation into the accidental shooting death in 2004 of Cpl. [Pat Tillman](#) by fellow Army Rangers in Afghanistan held General McChrystal accountable for inaccurate information provided by Corporal Tillman’s unit in recommending him for a Silver Star. The information wrongly suggested that Corporal Tillman had been killed by enemy fire.

At the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, where General McChrystal directs the 1,200-member group, he has instituted a daily 6:30 a.m. classified meeting among 25 top officers and, by video, military commanders around the world. In half an hour, the group races through military developments and problems over the past 24 hours.

Adm. [Mike Mullen](#), the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, brought General McChrystal back to Washington to be his director last August, and the physical proximity served General McChrystal well, Defense officials said. In recent weeks, Admiral Mullen recommended General McChrystal to Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates as a replacement for General McKiernan.

One other thing to know about General McChrystal: when he was a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in 2000, he ran a dozen miles each morning to the council’s offices from his quarters at Fort Hamilton on the southwestern tip of Brooklyn.

“If you asked me the first thing that comes to mind about General McChrystal,” said Leslie H. Gelb, the president emeritus of the council, “I think of no body fat.”

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