

# The Huntsville Times

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## Laird Slips in, Out for Two-Night

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Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird was secretly flown to Redstone Arsenal Thursday under a heavy cloak of security and just as quickly disappeared this morning to return to Washington.

Laird, his wife, Barbara, and 17-year-old son, David, arrived at Redstone Army Airfield from Washington aboard an Air Force Jetstar and returned in the an Air Force Jetstar and departed this morning from the Huntsville - Madison County Jetport.

The unusual visit — first for a secretary of defense since Robert McNa-

mara accompanied President Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson to Redstone in 1962 — was officially confirmed only after Laird and his family were airborne for the return trip.

Laird declined to be interviewed. Officials said he was here to enjoy the Thanksgiving holidays with friends, but declined to identify Laird's hosts.

David G. Harris, public information officer for the Army Missile Command, confirmed the Laird visit this morning. He insisted that Laird had come to Huntsville for "purely personal reasons."

Harris said Laird did not visit or discuss "business" with officers at the

Army Missile Command, Safeguard System Command, Army Missile and Munitions Center and School, Safeguard Logistics Command or the Corps of Engineers.

For several days, The Times had observed unusual approaches to special security being taken far beyond the scope of a normal visit by a government official.

Speculation had been that a Cabinet level officer of the Nixon administration might be involved, although there were no official confirmations.

In confirming the Laird visit, officials also insisted there was "nothing political about it at all."

Laird was met on arrival by Maj. Gen. Edwin I. Donley, commanding general of the Army Missile Command and ranking officer at the sprawling post.

During the visit, Laird and his family were quartered at Goddard House on Redstone Road on the arsenal, but left the post to visit.

Officials said he spent part of the day Thursday watching football, had planned to golf Friday, but decided against it because of poor weather.

The Goddard House has been guest quarters for only two other secretaries of defense in its history.

Charles E. Wilson was the first to spend the night at the Goddard House in

February, 1956, when he was secretary of defense in the Eisenhower Administration.

Thomas Gates, also a secretary of defense in the Eisenhower administration, spent the night at Goddard House in October, 1957 — the night the Russians put up their first Sputnik.

In declining through middle-men an interview with The Times, Laird had requested of Redstone officials that his "privacy be protected while here." No further explanation was given.

Officials declined to detail how Laird arrived, when he would leave and where he was staying until the secretary was airborne this morning.