By Christopher Ruddy

It is a sad day for America when a national giant passes. Adm. Thomas Moorer, of Eufaula, Ala., was such a giant. His passing this week is especially sad for me. Adm. Moorer was a friend, adviser, and member of the Board of Directors of NewsMax.com's parent company, NewsMax Media, Inc.

Adm. Moorer was a man "in the arena," as Theodore Roosevelt would have described him. Even at the age of 91, the admiral had kept quite active in public affairs.

            This dynamo of a man made his first landing on an aircraft carrier in 1935. I don't think I need to detail the dangers of such landings without the instrumentation of today's planes. It was one of his hallmarks that he did not know fear. Thankfully, America produces such people.

During his life, Moorer had numerous brushes with death. He was present on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. As a combat pilot during the war, his plane was shot down over the South Pacific. Fortunately, he was rescued by a cargo supply ship. This episode would have been a great story in itself.

But it gets more interesting.

The supply ship that rescued him was carrying ordnance and explosives. When Japanese planes began bombing the supply ship, Moorer and a handful of others realized it would be better to abandon the ship early. Most of the crew didn't see it the same way as Moorer and stayed. Moorer entered the lifeboat while most stayed aboard. The ship exploded and almost the entire crew was lost. Once again, for the second time in a matter of days, Moorer was adrift in the Pacific in a tiny lifeboat. Miraculously, he and the survivors made it to a deserted island where he was discovered by an Australian airplane. For his heroism, Moorer was awarded both the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

I tell this story about Moorer in the South Pacific and his decision to evacuate the ammunition ship when most others would not because it illustrates a great deal about the man. Moorer had a certain clarity of thinking, a thinking that saw things as they are and how they might be. He could see things over the horizon. He also had the courage to go against perceived wisdom, make decisions and act on them.

That was what struck me about Adm. Moorer. Even at the advanced age of 91, he still possessed this certain clarity of vision. His plan would have ended Vietnam in 1964.

I remember speaking to him in the hours after the events of Sept. 11. He told me that the American people would soon forget about the tragedy and would not learn from it. He said he had seen this time and again. We don't learn from these things, he told me. I was flabbergasted, but he was correct.  Complacency is here today.

Adm. Moorer was full of anecdotes about his years in military service, his dealings with presidents, and his service as the nation's highest-ranking military official, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Adm. Moorer was chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the divisive days of the Vietnam War. The war was vexing for him, as it was for many Americans. He was even more anxious because he believed the conflict could have been ended quickly, with fewer casualties and more favorably to U.S. interests.

But the politicians did not let the military do their job. The days of FDR deferring to Gen. Marshall and the military were over. Adm. Moorer's advice to President Richard Nixon was simple bomb North Vietnam's infrastructure in and around Hanoi and mine North Vietnam's key ports. This would effectively cut them off and force them to end the war. [Lesson learned in Strategy and Tactics 101: day 1, hour 1]

Despite all of Lyndon Johnson's carpet-bombing, the Pentagon had always been restricted [by Johnson / McNamara] to secondary targets that had little effect in undermining North Vietnam's war effort.

Nixon told Adm. Moorer that he would not agree. Nixon was worried that if the U.S. were too bold, the Chinese would join the war and perhaps ignite a global conflagration. Also, Nixon was concerned about the American POWs held by the North. The State Department warned that if the U.S. stepped up the war, the POWs would suffer more. Adm. Moorer told Nixon that China would not enter the war and that once the North Vietnamese understood our new resolve, the treatment of the POWs would actually improve.

By 1972, the conflict had been in progress for seven years and American policies had failed. Hanoi had agreed to peace talks in Paris, but the communists were intransigent.

As Adm. Moorer recounted to me, a frustrated Nixon suddenly summoned Moorer. At the time, the admiral was on a military jet heading to Europe for a NATO meeting. The plane made an immediate U-turn over the Atlantic and returned to Washington. Moorer told me that Nixon was at Camp David, in one of the retreat's rooms, with a longtime friend. Nixon asked what Moorer thought they should do. He told them bluntly Bomb North Vietnam as they had never done before.

Nixon, nervously, gave Moorer the OK. Beginning on Dec. 18, 1972, the U.S. unleashed the largest, most concentrated bombing campaign in its history -- the campaign was dubbed "the Christmas bombings." For nearly two weeks U.S. pilots flew almost 4,000 sorties. B-52s were brought in and flew more than 700 bombing runs over key North Vietnam targets. Within days the North Vietnamese were suing for peace. And as Moorer recalled, the POWs later reported that their communist captors, frightened by American power, began treating them more benignly.

Adm. Moorer's plan, **heeded belatedly**, brought an end to the nightmare of Vietnam.

Last Warning China

When I saw Adm. Moorer in Washington at a luncheon just a few months ago, I introduced him by saying, "Admiral Moorer may have retired from the Navy, but he never retired from America." After leaving the Joint Chiefs, Moorer began an active business and political life.

During the late '70s, he was very critical of President Carter for having forsaken the Shah of Iran and allowing the Soviet Union to go unchallenged after invading Afghanistan. Notably, Adm. Moorer was also a sharp critic of **Carter's treaty to transfer the Panama Canal** to the Panamanian government.

In recent years, the admiral recalled to me his testimony to the U.S. Senate opposing the Panama giveaway. He told the Senate that if the U.S. left Panama, the Soviet Union or another communist power would fill the vacuum created by America's departure. As a military and navy man, Adm. Moorer understood the strategic importance of shipping. As one who understood the Pacific theater, he knew a war in Korea or elsewhere in Asia required the U.S. to have unimpeded access through the canal. In a serious conflict, days could be crucial. Only an American military presence near the canal could guarantee such access.

The Democrat controlled Senate did not agree and gave President Carter the OK to sign the Panama Canal Treaty. But the clear-thinking Moorer turned out to be right. A communist power filled the gap when the Panamanians gave Hutchison-Whampoa, a Communist China company, operational control over the canal [They still have control over the canal as of this message]. Adm. Moorer said that when he warned the Senate that some communist power would fill the vacuum in Panama he never, in his wildest dreams, thought that country would be China.

In his closing years, Moorer's singular worry was China. He believed that Red China was using front companies like Hutchison to set up strategic bases near key "choke points" for control over shipping lanes. He was also quite disturbed that China's Hutchison had taken control of the port in Freeport, the Bahamas just 60 miles from Florida [a major fuel depository].

Moorer saw China's demand for Taiwan as just one reason the Chinese may go to war sometime in the future with the U.S. There is also a struggle for hegemony over Asia. And he never bought the notion that Beijing's ideological Maoists had any intention of remaking China into a democracy. Inevitably, he argued, China will be in a conflict with the United States. China's enormous population makes this likely and worrisome.

Adm. Moorer's concern was that Chinese leaders might someday believe they could absorb a nuclear attack, lose 200 million people and still have 800 million left.

The U.S. cannot withstand such a loss. China's population made naught the concept of mutually assured destruction which had helped maintain lukewarm peace with Russia for decades.

So, when we honor and remember this great warrior, we should remember his last warning Beware of China. To the very end, this heroic American was looking out for his country with his certain clarity of thinking.

The Washington Post

Adm. Thomas Moorer Dies; Chaired Joint Chiefs of Staff

By Adam Bernstein

Saturday, February 7, 2004; Page B07

Navy Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, 91, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during crucial years of the Vietnam War who advocated aggressive force to win the conflict, died Feb. 5 at National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda after a stroke.

A tall, soft-spoken and stern southerner, Adm. Moorer was considered a master strategist often called on to handle tense and fragile situations. He occupied a series of increasingly prominent positions from the beginning of major military involvement in Vietnam until its end.

He was Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet during the disputed Tonkin Gulf clash between U.S. and North Vietnamese sea forces in 1964. This crisis led Congress to authorize President Lyndon B. Johnson to take all measures to protect U.S. forces and "to prevent further aggression." This gave Johnson free rein to bomb North Vietnam and commit U.S. ground forces to the conflict in South Vietnam. Adm. Moorer supported these measures.

From 1967 to 1970, he was Chief of Naval Operations, the Navy's top uniformed officer and its representative among the joint chiefs. As the conflict in Vietnam continued, he grew frustrated with the executive branch's strategy of containment of Communist forces in the North instead of total victory. He and other military officials felt the enemy would crumble only with a convincing show of force. He spent years trying to persuade officials to mine Haiphong Harbor, a supply route for Hanoi, until it was finally done in 1972.

By then he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the nation's top military officer. He kept a relatively low public profile during his two-term tenure, which ended with his retirement in 1974. Among the issues, conflicts, and resolutions he faced were arms-limitation talks with the Soviet Union, the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, and the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Decades later, Adm. Moorer again figured in the news because of the war. He had been a source for a much-disputed 1998 CNN report on Operation Tailwind, which charged that U.S. forces used a lethal nerve gas on American defectors in Laos during the war. The Admiral denied knowledge of its use. CNN retracted the report, fired two producers and reprimanded the on-air reporter, Peter Arnett.

"It was an insult to the young men that do this very dangerous work to try to set up accusations they were trying to kill Americans," Moorer told The Washington Post. “The CNN report made everyone mad as hell. No Americans were killed, no gas was dropped."

Thomas Hinman Moorer was a native of Mount Willing, Alabama. His father was a dentist and state representative, and his mother was a teacher. The younger Moorer's interests were mechanical engineering and military science, and at age 15 he was his high school class's valedictorian.

Because of his age, he had to wait two years before admittance to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, where he was a varsity football lineman. He graduated in 1933 near the top of his class.

He completed flight training in Pensacola in 1936 and was stationed at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese launched a surprise attack on Dec. 7, 1941. He was one of the first pilots to get his plane in the air. He went with his squadron to the South Pacific as part of the effort to stem the Japanese advance toward Australia. On a reconnaissance mission, he and his crew were shot down by nine Japanese fighters, and the future admiral was wounded in the hip by shrapnel. The plane was in flames and speeding toward the water at 100 mph, but he managed to stop the craft after bouncing three times on the water's surface.

Rescued by a Philippine freighter, the crew was again besieged within minutes when Japanese dive bombers attacked the ship. He led those onboard to two lifeboats and guided them to an uninhabited island. He drew a large SOS sign in the sand and was spotted two days later by Australian fliers. For his actions, he received the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

After the war, he attended the Naval War College in Rhode Island and held a succession of sea command posts and prestigious desk assignments. He was aided by Adm. Arleigh A. Burke [USNA ‘23], the brilliant and ambitious war hero whom Adm. Moorer served as assistant Chief of Naval Operations in the late 1950s. He was promoted to rear admiral in 1958, reportedly becoming at age 45 the youngest officer at the time selected for that rank. He made vice admiral in 1962 and full admiral two years later. Time magazine called him "America's fastest-rising sailor."

In August 1967, Adm. Moorer became the 18th Chief of Naval Operations. The next January, the lightly armed spy ship Pueblo was seized by the North Koreans in what they claimed were its territorial waters. Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, and his crew were held and tortured for 11 months before their release after signing false confessions.

A Naval Court of Inquiry had recommended Bucher be tried by court-martial, and Adm. Moorer supported it. Doing otherwise, he said, would set the principle not to fight back unless one could overwhelm the enemy. Bucher, who died last month, said his actions saved lives. In 1969, the Secretary of the Navy [politician] declared Bucher had "suffered enough" and decided against a court-martial.

Adm. Moorer also faced concerns about proper war strategy in Vietnam and a period of Soviet military proliferation. In those matters, he advocated a determined approach putting more troops in Vietnam on the advice of front-line commanders and supporting new technologies that made for quieter nuclear submarines.

According to a History of the Chiefs of Naval Operations, Adm. Moorer felt many of his efforts to modernize the Navy's fleet went unmet because Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara gave budgeting priority to services whose materiel and weaponry had deteriorated most in combat use. Naval warships did not meet that threshold.

Adm. Moorer was reappointed Chief of Naval Operations by President Richard M. Nixon in 1969 and named Chairman of the Joint Chiefs the next year. Moorer told an interviewer that the executive branch relied mainly on civilian advisers more than its military ones, leading to limitations in his power; that not many in the public grasped. He said there were those who felt the military was too weak to exert proper control of the war and those who felt it had too much influence over civilian authority. "Both of these allegations," he said on his retirement, "are nonsense in its purest form."

As a civilian, Adm. Moorer, a Bethesda resident, maintained an active interest in military and security affairs and testified on Capitol Hill about security concerns. He also accepted board memberships at Texaco and defense contractor CACI International, among other firms.

Survivors include his wife of 68 years, Carrie Foy Moorer of Bethesda; four children, Thomas R. Moorer of Dallas, Ellen Butcher of Fort Myers, Fla., Richard F. Moorer of Cabin John, and Robert H. Moorer of Gaithersburg; two brothers; 10 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.