

Lang, John Albert, Jr. (15 November 1910 - 27 June 1974) teacher, Federal civil servant, and Air Force reserve major general, was born in Carthage, North Carolina, son of John A. Lang, Sr. and Laura Kelly Lang, the former a son of John Frederik Lang who changed his name from Jansson when he migrated from Sodra Bro Gallesta, Sweden, in 1875 to New Britain, Connecticut, where he was active in the cultural life of the Swedish community before moving to North Carolina. Laura Kelly was the great granddaughter of Abel Alexander Kelly, a Presbyterian, who left Ireland with his family sometime prior to 1825 and settled in Moore County, North Carolina, establishing a grist mill there and subsequently serving two terms in the state legislature; he was a staunch Unionist with anti-slavery leanings.

John A. Lang, Jr. was graduated, Phi Beta Kappa, from the University of North Carolina in 1930, remained for another year to earn a Master of Arts degree before accepting a position as head of the English department and Professor of Government at Georgia Military Academy. The first significant step in his public or political life came in 1935 when for two years he served as president of the National Student Federation with offices in New York City. This led to his appointment as assistant to the Director of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp Education in the U. S. Office of Education, a post he occupied until 1938 when he was appointed State Administrator of the National Youth Administration in North Carolina. In 1942 he enlisted in the U. S. Army Air Corps, eventually serving in Alaska, North Africa and Italy; he had advanced to the grade of major by the time he returned to private life in 1946. After a brief period with the Better Health Association in Raleigh, North Carolina, he was selected

as Administrative Assistant by U. S. Representative Charles B. Deane of North Carolina, whom he served for ten years until the congressman was defeated. During those ten years Lang honed his political skills to a high polish and developed a wide circle of friends on Capitol Hill, becoming a valuable political asset in the process. As a consequence, after a brief stint with the House of Representatives Committee on Government Operations, he was selected as Administrative Assistant by U. S. Representative Robert E. Jones of Alabama, whom he served from 1957 to 1961 when he was appointed Deputy for Reserve and ROTC Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force.

Lang's move from Capitol Hill to the Pentagon marked a merger of his political career with his role as a member of the Air Force Reserve in which he had been active since World War II. The assignment proved to be a happy one; Lang's expansive personality and willingness to work tirelessly in the interest of others made him nationally popular with reservists as well as with his superiors in the Secretariat. Soon after taking office in 1961 he performed brilliantly in the mobilization of Air National Guardsmen and Air Force Reservists for the Berlin and Cuban crises. For his efforts in this period he was given the Exceptional Civilian Service award, an honor he subsequently received on two other occasions.

In 1964 the Secretary of the Air Force appointed Lang Administrative Assistant, in which position he became the senior career civil servant in the Air Force. In this office he was charged with the management and administration of the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force and, under the Presidential Transition Act of 1963, with the orderly transfer of power from one Administration to the next. In 1968, while still serving in this capacity, he was promoted to major general in the Air Force reserve with a mobilization assignment as assistant to the Superintendent of the Air.

Force Academy. Probably the most impressive manifestation of the respect Lang had earned by his dedicated service on behalf of the Air Force came in 1969 when a Republican Administration took over the Government. Although a lifelong Democrat prominently identified with the party, he was retained as Administrative Assistant by the incoming Republican Secretary whom he served loyally and efficiently, not only in his administrative role, but also as the Secretary's personal representative on various boards and councils.

A big broad-shouldered man standing well over six feet, Lang was ever concerned to keep fit; during his years in the Secretariat, he regularly used his lunch break to stride vigorously around the perimeter of the Pentagon. The principal qualities of personality which made him so notably effective were his expansive, outgoing nature, his generosity, and his genuine delight in serving others; his unspoken motto seemed to be: any friend of my friend is a friend to me. It was characteristic of him that despite the many public concerns which burdened him during his long residence in Washington, for 19 years he found time to teach a Bible class in his church. His frequent references to the folk wisdom of rural sages from his beloved Moore County, North Carolina, became something of a by-word in the Pentagon and greatly endeared him to his Air Force colleagues. With the reflexive response of a professional politician to crowds, Lang genuinely enjoyed the frequent occasions he was called upon to present some message of concern to the Air Force before a large audience; he was never happier than when that audience happened to be in North Carolina.

By the time Lang retired in 1971 after 36 years of Federal service, he had received many marks of distinction, among them the Air Force Association Citation of Honor, 1964, and on two occasions the Reserve Officers

Association of the U. S. Distinguished Service Citation, 1964 and 1969, as well as military decorations including the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medal, among others.

Retirement from Federal service did not mark the end of Lang's active career. From Washington he moved to Greenville, North Carolina where he was appointed Vice Chancellor of East Carolina University. Scarcely had he begun on this new career when Governor Robert Scott called him to Raleigh in March, 1972, to accept a cabinet office as Secretary of the newly formed Department of Military and Veterans Affairs where he would supervise the office of the North Carolina Adjutant General including the National Guard, Office of Civil Defense, Civil Air Patrol, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Armory Commission. At the close of the Scott Administration Lang returned to his post as Vice Chancellor of East Carolina University where he died unexpectedly at the age of 64 from an infection. He was buried in his hometown of Carthage.

Lang was married to Catherine Gibson Lang of Gibson, North Carolina, 20 November 1947; they had four children: John A. Lang, III, Richard Gibson Lang, Laura Catherine Lang, and Martha Elizabeth Lang.

[See: Who's Who in America, 1972-1973; Who's Who in the South and the Southwest, 1975-1976; USAF official biography (1 April 1971). Lang's papers, including genealogical and biographical data are deposited in the East Carolina University Library.]

I. B. Holley, Jr.