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## **Pentagon job a significant step**

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WASHINGTON - When Gordon England was nominated as deputy defense secretary in late March, he called his wife of 43 years to break the news. Dotty England was characteristically supportive -- and realistic.

"I'll probably only see you on C-Span," she responded.

Just over four years ago, the former Fort Worth aerospace executive was looking toward retirement when President Bush tapped him to become secretary of the Navy. While Dotty remained behind at their home in Benbrook, Gordon England headed to Washington to take charge of the Navy and Marine Corps for one of Washington's most demanding bosses -- Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

England, who grew up in a blue-collar Baltimore neighborhood and worked his way into the top levels of the aerospace industry, approached the task with leadership techniques that made him a success in the business world. He displayed the same level of respect for sailors and Marine grunts as he did for generals and admirals, attacked problems through teamwork and consensus and made a point of being honest and direct.

In the process, the 67-year-old adopted Texan fashioned a reputation across Washington as a straight-shooter and effective problem-solver. Critics are hard to find, even among those who disagree with England on the issues.

Now, with his nomination to be No. 2 at the Pentagon, England's genial personality and approachable leadership style will be tested even further as he confronts his biggest job yet.

If confirmed by the Senate, he will assume day-to-day responsibilities for running the Defense Department, the world's largest organization with 3 million military and civilian personnel and an annual budget larger than the economy of many small countries.

The Senate Armed Services Committee will consider his nomination Tuesday, and committee chairman Sen. John Warner, R-Va., said England is virtually guaranteed approval by both the committee and the full Senate. Still, Warner said the nominee could face "lively" questions at the hearing, particularly from Democrats, over issues ranging from weapons procurement to the Iraq war.

England would replace Paul Wolfowitz, who Bush named as president of the World Bank. In contrast to Wolfowitz, one of the administration's "neo-conservatives" and a leading architect of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, England is expected to be less visible in shaping policy and instead will ply his business skills in managing the immense military bureaucracy, as well as taking on any special assignment Rumsfeld throws at him.

Rumsfeld has already entrusted the Navy secretary with major extracurricular assignments to reshape the Defense Department's civilian personnel system and preside over commissions reviewing the status of detainees being held by U.S. authorities in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"There is a term used around the Pentagon that he's the secretary's go-to guy," said former Pentagon comptroller Dov Zakheim, who was part of Rumsfeld's team during Bush's first term in the White House. "That's an accurate description."

In his new role, England will gain a far larger portfolio, including a hands-on supervision of base-closings and a far-reaching study which could determine the future of projects such as the F/A-22, joint strike fighter and V-22 Osprey.

The job will also provide an expanded forum for what admirers describe as his proven "people skills," a trademark spanning from his days as head of Fort Worth's military aircraft plant to his post-9-11 visits with Marines and sailors in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He makes frequent visits to see wounded personnel at the Bethesda Navy Hospital in suburban Maryland and unfailingly writes sympathy letters to the families of Marines or Navy personnel killed in combat. Tamera Treadwell, the wife of 30-year-old Marine Staff Sgt. James Treadwell, recalls a gesture by England that said she softened her views about the Pentagon's attitude toward the families of combat troops.

While her husband was assigned with a reconnaissance unit in Iraq, Treadwell met England during a visit with family members at Camp Pendleton, Calif. The Navy secretary instructed his aide to take a picture of Tamera Treadwell and the couple's five children.

A few weeks later, during a trip to Iraq, England located Sgt. Treadwell and gave him the family picture. He then snapped a photo of Treadwell holding the picture and mailed it to the sergeant's wife.

"You feel like to people of that position you're just a number," Tamera Treadwell said in a recent telephone interview. "When he took that much effort to find my husband, it really made a difference. It really touched my family."