

JUNE 1, 1987

Must Reading

The ultimate viewer's guide

Senate Select Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye has one. So does Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh. So, too, does just about every journalist, congressional staffer and attorney investigating the labyrinthine intricacies of the Iran-*contra* scandal. Known simply as the *Chron*, the 678-page paperback (Warner Books; \$5.95) has become the ultimate viewer's guide to the hearings.

Subtitled *The Documented Day-by-Day Account of the Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Contras*, *The Chronology* is the maiden effort of the National Security Archive, a nonprofit institute opened in October by former Washington *Post* Reporter Scott Armstrong. Using the Freedom of Information Act to obtain Government documents, the group acts as a clearinghouse for journalists and scholars researching issues from nuclear strategy to Central America.

Now operating with 30 staffers and a \$1 million budget (mainly raised from foundations), the Archive started as a storage space for Armstrong, dubbed the "Great Accumulator" by his former colleague and co-author Bob Woodward (*The Brethren*). Armstrong, 41, who worked for the Senate Watergate Committee before joining the *Post*, began collecting documents by the carload in 1982 for a book about U.S. foreign policy. When his *Post* computer showed signs of overload, Armstrong created a place where Government documents like his could be stored and shared: a kind of national-security Nexus.

The Chronology began as a diversion, when various congressional committees asked Armstrong to gather documents about the *contras*. The group's research, along with news accounts, congressional investigations and the Tower commission report, were incorporated into a blow-by-blow narrative. The Archive's aggressive use of the Freedom of Information Act already has the Administration on guard. Now, when Justice Department employees get a request from Armstrong, they are instructed to call a special agency phone number before supplying details. ■



The Accumulator: Armstrong with documents