

**Edward C. Aldridge, Jr.**

June 9, 1986–December 15, 1988



*Portrait by Everett Raymond Kinstler*



**E**DWARD C. ALDRIDGE, JR., was born on August 18, 1938, in Houston, Texas. He spent his youth in Shreveport, Louisiana, across the river from Barksdale Air Force Base, where he learned to admire the U.S. Air Force and the leaders who made it a great institution.

He received a bachelor of science degree in aeronautical engineering from Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1960 and a master of science degree in the same field from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1962. Following his formal education, Aldridge held various staff and management positions with the Douglas Aircraft Company, Missile and Space Division, in Santa Monica, California, and in Washington, D.C. Aldridge married Joanne Knotts of Italy, Texas, and they had four children.

In 1967 he joined the staff of the assistant secretary of defense for systems analysis as an operations research analyst and then served as director of the strategic defensive division until July 1972. He also served as an adviser to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty talks in Helsinki, Finland, and Vienna, Austria. In 1972 he reentered private industry as a senior manager with LTV Aerospace Corporation in Dallas, Texas, and remained there for a year before being named senior management associate at the Office of Management and Budget, in the executive office of the president.

Aldridge returned to the Department of Defense in February 1974 as deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategic programs. In March 1976 he became the director of planning and evaluation, serving as a principal adviser to the secretary of defense in the planning and program evaluation of U.S. military forces and support structure.

In March 1977 Aldridge became vice president of the national policy and strategic systems group for the Systems Planning Corporation in Arlington, Virginia, where he was responsible for the study and analysis of strategic and conventional forces and long-range strategic planning. In August 1981 he became undersecretary of the Air Force, with additional responsibility for providing overall direction, guidance, and supervision of Air Force space programs, including launch and on-orbit operations and planning for future space capabilities. Before the space shuttle *Challenger* accident in January 1986, Aldridge was in astronaut training at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger said at Aldridge's swearing-in ceremony that as "we pursue the President's Strategic Defense Initiative, Secretary Aldridge's space program background, his expertise in strategic defense, and his commitment to the program will be enormously useful."

After taking over as air secretary in the second year of President Ronald Reagan's second term, Aldridge did not plan on changing the priorities of the secretariat. He claimed he would continue his predecessors' emphasis on people programs, with special focus on retaining quality personnel. He foresaw tremendous budget cuts as well as structural changes issuing from the administration's implementation of the findings of the Blue Ribbon (Packard) Commission on Defense Management. He understood that it would be impossible to maintain the rate of growth in the Air Force budget that had been enjoyed in the previous five years, warning that, "at best, we might be able to sustain a very limited real growth, and it's going to be tougher to get the military manpower to man our forces." Thus, programs having cost, scheduling, or performance difficulties would be scrutinized closely in terms of requirements and quite possibly would be cut.

During his tenure, Aldridge consistently pursued personnel benefits, including pay raises for civilians and for the military and bonus retention initiatives for military members. Following a trip to the USSR in the summer of 1988, the air secretary reported on the wish of the Soviet government to join with the United States in an exploration of Mars through both unmanned and manned space missions. Aldridge supported the C-17 program and defended the B-1B program, and he was critical of those politicians who chose to use the bomber as a political football. Attaining his office in the wake of the *Challenger* disaster, Aldridge worked very hard to rebuild Air Force space-launch capability and to reduce the service's reliance on the space shuttle to put military payloads into orbit.

After leaving office in December 1988, Aldridge became president of McDonnell Douglas Electronic Systems Company. He remained there until 1992, when he became president and chief executive officer of the Aerospace Corporation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the objective application of science and technology toward the solution of critical national problems.

Among his many awards and honors are the Secretary of Defense Meritorious Civilian Service Award, three Department of Defense Distinguished Civilian Service Awards, the Department of Defense Distinguished Public Service Award, the Air Force Exceptional Civilian Service Award, the Army Distinguished Civilian Service Award, the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Award, the National Space Club Robert H. Goddard Memorial Trophy, the Air Force Association Jimmy Doolittle Fellow, the Air Force Association Ira Eaker Fellow, and two Air Force Academy Foundation Distinguished American Awards. He also received the Max Kriendler, W. Stuart Symington, and Gen. Bernard Schriever Awards from the Air Force Association.