

John C. Stetson

April 6, 1977–May 18, 1979



JOHN C. STETSON was born on September 6, 1920, in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1943 with a bachelor of science degree in aeronautical engineering and did postgraduate work at Northwestern University School of Business from 1946 to 1948. He was employed as a structural engineer for Douglas Aircraft Company during World War II before being commissioned in the U.S. Navy, where he served as a communications officer until the end of the war. After he returned to civilian life and completed his studies, he resumed an engineering career in the Chicago area. He served as project manager for Foote Brothers Gear and Machine Company from 1949 to 1951. From 1951 to 1965 he was a member of and then a partner in the consulting firm of Booz, Allen and Hamilton, responsible for a number of assignments with aircraft companies and major oil companies operating in the Middle East. In January 1946 Stetson married Gale McDowell and they had three children.

In 1963 Stetson went to Houston, Texas, to become president of the publishing division of the *Houston Post* Company. In 1970 he returned to Chicago to become president of the A. B. Dick Company, manufacturer and international distributor of business machines, a position he held until he became the twelfth secretary of the Air Force in 1977.

As President Jimmy Carter's new air secretary, Stetson realized from the start of his tenure that the austerity mood of the administration and the Congress would continue to affect Air Force budgets. He recognized the need to seek out additional avenues, original ideas, and enlightened management practices to enhance Air Force readiness and combat capability and further streamline the service's business methods. He envisioned an era of limited resources during which there was little expectation that the USSR would diminish its efforts, at military technological expansion. Therefore, he believed that the Air Force would have to operate more economically and efficiently. A year into his term he concluded that U.S. taxpayers ought to be assured that the Air Force was squeezing every ounce of capability from its allotted resources: the Air Force had cut its manpower, reduced the number of major installations, and used the savings to reinforce its combat units and to develop new aircraft systems.

When Secretary Stetson left office in June 1979 to return to his business activities in the private sector, President Carter commended his managerial expertise and genuine concern for

Air Force personnel and their families. Carter also believed that Stetson had done much to effect significant improvements in the nation's air posture to meet commitments as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In addition to serving as president of his own company, J. C. Stetson Inc., Stetson became a director of several companies, including the Kemper Corporation; NIBCO, Inc.; Madison-Kipp Corporation; Helene Curtis; and Chicago Tube and Iron.