

Gen. David Charles Jones

July 1, 1974–June 20, 1978



Portrait by Robert L. Scharr



DAVID CHARLES JONES was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, on July 9, 1921. Growing up in Minot, North Dakota, he often rode his bicycle to a nearby airfield and fantasized about becoming a combat pilot. Following graduation from the local high school, he attended the University of North Dakota and Minot State College. In April 1942 he left college to join the U.S. Army Air Corps and received his commission and pilot's wings in February 1943.

After serving as a flying instructor in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, Lieutenant Jones was assigned to the 3d Emergency Rescue Squadron of the Fifth Air Force in Japan in 1945. He began as a unit pilot, flying Catalina flying boats, and rose to command the squadron. He was promoted to captain in April 1946. From 1948 to 1949 Jones was a unit instructor and then assistant operations and training officer with the 2236th Air Force Reserve Training Center, Godman Field, Kentucky. Also during this period, he attended the Air Tactical School at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida; the Atomic Energy Course at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi; and the Armed Forces Special Weapons Course at Sandia Base, New Mexico.

Jones was assigned to the 19th Bombardment Squadron at March Air Force Base, California, in January 1950 and promoted to major in February 1951. During his three-and-one-half years with the 19th, he rose to aircraft commander, then operations officer, and finally commander of the squadron. He flew more than three hundred hours on combat missions over North Korea, when the squadron was one of the first bombardment units committed to the Korean War. In May 1953 he transitioned from bombers to tankers, taking command of the 22d Air Refueling Squadron at March Air Force Base. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in June 1953, he remained at March but returned to bombers the following year as commander of the 33d Bombardment Squadron.

Jones next served at Headquarters Strategic Air Command (SAC), Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, during SAC's build-up period. He was assigned initially in September 1954 as an operations planner in the bomber mission branch and remained there until January 1955, when Gen. Curtis E. LeMay selected him as his aide. Promoted to colonel in April 1957, Jones became director of materiel and later deputy commander for maintenance of SAC's 93d Bombardment Wing at Castle Air Force Base, California. Following a stint at the

National War College in 1960, Jones was assigned to the Air Staff's operations directorate for four years. As chief of the manned systems branch, he worked on the B-70 bomber project. He then served as deputy chief and chief of the Strategic Division. After F-100 and F-4 training, Jones assumed command of the 33d Tactical Fighter Wing, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, at its activation in 1965 and brought it to operational status.

Jones then served in key staff assignments with U.S. Air Forces Europe (USAFE). In October 1965 he became USAFE inspector general, responsible for inspecting units at more than ninety installations in ten countries. He was promoted to brigadier general in December 1965. In January 1967 he became USAFE chief of staff and, in June, deputy chief of staff for plans and operations. He received his second star in November 1967.

In February 1969 Jones was assigned to Headquarters Seventh Air Force, Tan Son Nhut Airfield, Republic of Vietnam, as deputy chief of staff for operations and became vice commander in June. Promoted to lieutenant general, he returned to SAC in August 1969 as commander of the Second Air Force, headquartered at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana. In April 1971 General Jones returned to USAFE as vice commander in chief. He assumed command of USAFE and the Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force in August and was promoted to general in September. In his North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) capacity as commander of the Fourth Allied Tactical Air Force, General Jones directed an international planning team that integrated central region air forces into a more cohesive organization. Key to that effort was his creation of a small operational and planning headquarters, Allied Air Force, Central Europe.

Capping a career that had included operational and command positions in bomber, tanker, training, and tactical fighter units as well as headquarters staff positions, General Jones became chief of staff of the Air Force in July 1974. A major theme throughout his tenure was "readiness." He concluded that in any future conflict the United States was unlikely to enjoy the past luxury of long "acceleration lanes" in which "to mobilize, train, and deploy the cutting edge of our combat capability." He noted that because our nonexpansionist foreign policy tends to concede the initiative to an aggressor, "we have to remain perpetually ready for a come-as-you-are conflict." Therefore, to face the reality of a more ready and efficient if not austere Air Force, General Jones pursued a policy of developing high-technology weapons systems. In addition, he reorganized the Air Force command structure and substantially reduced headquarters staffs. He supported modernization with such systems as the F-15 and F-16, the A-10, and the EA-3A (AWACS). Much of the modernization program was focused on the European area, where the United States developed initiatives in response to Department of Defense and congressional interest for an increase in the capability of NATO.

After four years as chief of staff of the Air Force, General Jones became President Jimmy Carter's nominee to the ninth chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The only chairman who was not a college or service academy graduate, Jones presided over the JCS during a period of increasing Soviet military power and the emergence of militant Islam as a threat to

pro-Western regimes in the Persian Gulf region. During his tenure as chairman, defense funding increased in response to the Soviet threat and continuing JCS advocacy of strategic force modernization despite progress on strategic arms control.

Jones accompanied President Carter to Vienna, Austria, in June 1979 for the final stage of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II negotiations with the USSR. When the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan raised fears that Soviet forces there might move into neighboring Iran, where an anti-Western militant Islamic regime had taken power in early 1979, President Carter created a rapid deployment force (RDF) for Southwest Asia to counter any such attempt in the region. Subsequently, at the direction of the secretary of defense, General Jones oversaw planning for the transformation of the RDF into a regional unified command. The planning for what in 1983 became the U.S. Central Command was essentially completed during his chairmanship.

Jones also oversaw the planning for the rescue of the U.S. embassy personnel taken hostage in November 1979 by followers of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, and he survived the criticism for that rescue mission's failure. During his second term as chairman, Jones worked to make the chairman, rather than the corporate JCS, the principal military adviser to the president and the secretary of defense, arguing that such a change of the National Security Act would improve the quality and timeliness of military advice and the combined readiness and effectiveness of the nation's combat forces. Jones continued his efforts toward that goal after his retirement as chairman of the JCS and saw it come to fruition with the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act in 1986.