



JOSEPH RALSTON

1 March 1996 — 29 February 2000

Joseph Ralston was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, on 4 November 1943 and spent his early childhood in Fairview, Kentucky. He moved to Norwood, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati, when he was eleven and graduated from Norwood High School. Ralston worked his way through Miami University of Ohio, receiving a bachelor of arts in chemistry in June 1965. A distinguished graduate of the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Regular Air Force that July.

Following pilot and combat crew training and promotion to first lieutenant in January 1967, Ralston served as an F-105 fighter pilot with tactical fighter squadrons based at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, from April 1967 until October 1969. During that time Lieutenant Ralston flew missions over Southeast Asia out of Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, and deployed to Korea in response to North Korea's seizure of the USS *Pueblo*. He was promoted to captain in July 1968. Captain Ralston returned to Southeast Asia in 1970 as an F-105 Wild Weasel pilot with the 354th Tactical Fighter Squadron, flying out of Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, to counter North Vietnamese anti-aircraft missile defense. During his two tours in Southeast Asia, Ralston flew 147 combat missions over Laos and North Vietnam and received four awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross. His accomplishments included coordinating the rescue of a downed crew while under prolonged hostile fire. On his return to the United States in October 1970, Ralston became a Wild Weasel instructor pilot with the 66th Fighter Weapons Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

General Joseph Ralston
United States Air Force



Lieutenant Ralston before a mission in Southeast Asia.

In December 1971 Ralston moved to his first assignment in the development of systems requirements, an area in which he would spend a significant portion of his career. Until June 1973 he was a fighter requirements officer and project officer for F-15 and lightweight fighter programs in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Requirements at Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. From there he went to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, North Carolina, where he was

Assistant Operations Officer with the 335th Tactical Fighter Squadron and then Chief of the Standardization and Evaluation Division of the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing. During the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Ralston organized and directed the flight planning team responsible for the rapid, nonstop movement of F-4 fighters from Seymour Johnson to Israel. He was promoted to major in December 1973. From June 1975 until June 1976 Major Ralston attended the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leaven-



Lieutenant General Ralston in the cockpit of his aircraft in Alaska.

worth, Kansas. In 1976 he also received a master's degree in personnel management from Central Michigan University.

In his first assignment at the Pentagon, Ralston spent the next three years on the Air Staff as a tactical systems requirements officer and program manager in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development, and Acquisition, where he was part of the original team overseeing development of Stealth technology. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in April 1978. In July 1979 he moved to Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, as Operations Officer of the 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron and later assumed command of

the squadron. Lieutenant Colonel Ralston returned to Headquarters Tactical Air Command in July 1980 as Special Assistant and then Executive Officer to the Commander. Promoted to colonel in June 1981, he was selected to attend the National War College at Fort McNair, Washington, DC, during 1983–1984.

The next dozen years saw him selected for increasingly important positions in requirements and acquisition as well as for significant command assignments. After graduating from the National War College, Colonel Ralston returned to the Air Staff, where, as Special Assistant for Low Observable Technology in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff



Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen swears in General Ralston as Vice Chairman, 1 March 1996.

for Research, Development, and Acquisition, he again played a key role in the development of Stealth technology and its application to the F-117 aircraft. In February 1986 Ralston received his second command: the 56th Tactical Training Wing at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. Returning to Headquarters Tactical Air Command in March 1987, he was responsible for the acquisition, production, and fielding of major weapons systems modernizing tactical air forces, first as Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and then as Deputy Chief of Staff for Requirements. He was promoted to brigadier general in March 1988. In June 1990 Brigadier General Ralston returned to the Pentagon; he received his sec-

ond star in August. For the next two years he continued to work in requirements and acquisition as Director of Tactical Programs in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition and then as Director of Operational Requirements in the Plans and Operations Directorate on the Air Staff.

Upon promotion to lieutenant general in June 1992, Ralston assumed command of the Alaskan Command, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command Region, 11th Air Force, and Joint Task Force Alaska at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. In July 1994 he returned to the Air Staff as Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations. In June 1995 Ralston assumed command of Air



General Ralston meets in Oman with Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Combat Command at Langley Air Force Base, responsible for training and equipping all Air Force, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve combat wings and squadrons in the United States and Panama. He received his fourth star in July.

General Ralston became the fourth Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 March 1996. He was the first Vice Chairman to serve a substantial portion of his tenure with more than one Chairman: nineteen months with General John M. Shalikashvili, USA, and twenty-nine months with General

Henry H. Shelton, USA. When General Ralston became Vice Chairman, General Shalikashvili and he agreed that Ralston would function as Shalikashvili's deputy, fully participating in all aspects of the Chairman's day-to-day activities, in addition to carrying out his specific responsibilities as Vice Chairman. Shalikashvili came to regard Ralston as his "most trusted adviser." Shelton and Ralston had an association of many years, which enabled them to work closely together from the beginning of Shelton's chairmanship and to continue the approach to sharing responsibilities

adopted at the beginning of Ralston's tenure. As a result of this arrangement, Ralston devoted at least half of his time to overseeing current operations.

During the four years of his tenure Ralston found himself increasingly absorbed in the interagency process. His active participation in the Deputies Committee, described by one of its members as "the chief operating committee for American foreign policy" during the second Clinton administration, ensured the inclusion of military advice in the early stages of policy formulation. General Ralston played a key role in the development of administration policy on the intervention in Kosovo and in guiding its implementation in the US-led air campaign there, where the US air forces demonstrated the results of his contributions to Air Force modernization.

Ralston brought to his duties as Chairman of the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) and Vice Chairman of the Defense Acquisition Board (DAB) his extensive experience in the requirements and acquisition process and in overseeing the develop-

ment of future technologies. In managing the JROC, he saw his function to be "harmonizing" service positions on programs so that national security needs could be met within budgetary constraints. To facilitate this, he created the two-star JROC Review Board (JRB) to determine which issues would go forward to the JROC. Ralston's work in coordinating the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the Defense Department's review of post-Cold War strategy and force structure, so impressed Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen that Cohen turned to the Vice Chairman for advice in other areas as well.

General Ralston completed his second term as Vice Chairman on 29 February 2000. President William J. Clinton, upon Cohen's recommendation, had nominated him to become Commander in Chief of the US European Command (CINCEUR) and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) the following May. He was the first Vice Chairman to move to another military position at the end of his tour of duty.

Joseph Ralston

General, USAF

Promotions

	Temporary	Permanent
2LT		24 Jul 65
1LT		24 Jan 67
CPT		24 Jul 68
MAJ		01 Dec 73
LTC		01 Apr 78
COL		01 Jun 81
BG		01 Mar 88
MG		01 Aug 90
LTG	13 Jul 92	
GEN	01 Jul 95	

Assignments

	From	To
Student, Pilot Training, Laughlin Air Force Base, TX	1965	1966
Student, F-105, Combat Crew Training School, Nellis Air Force Base, NV	1966	1967
F-105 Combat Crew Member, 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron, later 12th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Kadena Air Base, Okinawa	1967	1969
Student, F-105 Wild Weasel Pilot Training, Nellis Air Force Base, NV	1969	1969
F-105 Wild Weasel Pilot, 354th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand	1970	1970
F-105 Wild Weasel Instructor Pilot, 66th Fighter Weapons Squadron, Nellis Air Force Base, NV	1970	1971
Fighter Requirements Officer and Project Officer for F-15 and Lightweight Fighter Programs, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Requirements, Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, VA	1971	1973
Assistant Operations Officer, 335th Tactical Fighter Squadron; then Chief, Standardization and Evaluation Division, 4th Tactical Fighter Wing, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, NC	1973	1975

Assignments	Dates	
	From	To
Student, Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS	1975	1976
Tactical Fighter Requirements Officer, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Research and Development, Headquarters US Air Force, Washington, DC	1976	1979
Operations Officer, then Commander, 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Moody Air Force Base, GA	1979	1980
Special Assistant, then Executive Officer to the Commander, Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, VA	1980	1983
Student, National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC	1983	1984
Special Assistant for Low Observable Technology to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development and Acquisition, Headquarters US Air Force, Washington, DC	1984	1986
Commander, 56th Tactical Training Wing, MacDill Air Force Base, FL	1986	1987
Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, then Deputy Chief of Staff, Requirements, Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, VA	1987	1990
Director of Tactical Programs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Washington, DC	1990	1991
Director of Operational Requirements, Headquarters US Air Force, Washington, DC	1991	1992
Commander, Alaskan Command, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command Region, 11th Air Force, and Joint Task Force Alaska, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska	1992	1994
Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Headquarters US Air Force, Washington, DC	1994	1995
Commander, Headquarters Air Combat Command, Langley Air Force Base, VA	1995	1996
Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC	1996	2000
Commander in Chief, US European Command and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe	2000	

Principal US Military Decorations and Qualifications

Defense Distinguished Service Medal (with 1 oak leaf cluster)

Air Force Distinguished Service Medal

Legion of Merit (with 2 oak leaf clusters)

Distinguished Flying Cross (with 3 oak leaf clusters)

Meritorious Service Medal (with 2 oak leaf clusters)

Air Medal (with 19 oak leaf clusters)

Air Force Commendation Medal (with 4 oak leaf clusters)

Command Pilot