



FORMER
SECRETARY OF STATE



“LUCK tends to come
to people that are
well prepared.”

- Inducted: 1988 -

Biography: Colin Powell
Former Secretary of State, United States of America

Colin Powell Date of birth: April 5, 1937

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Colin Luther Powell was born in Harlem in 1937. His parents were Jamaican immigrants who stressed the importance of education and personal achievement. Powell grew up in the South Bronx, where he graduated from high school without having formed any definite ambition or direction in life. He entered the City College of New York to study geology and it was there, by his own account, that he found his calling when he joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). He became commander of his unit's precision drill team and graduated in 1958 at the top of his ROTC class, with the rank of cadet colonel, the highest rank in the corps.

Powell was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army, and was one of the 16,000 military advisors dispatched

to South Vietnam by President Kennedy in 1962. In 1963, Lieutenant Powell was wounded by a punji-stick booby trap while patrolling the Vietnamese border with Laos. He was awarded the Purple Heart, and later that year, the Bronze Star.



Powell served a second tour of duty in Vietnam in 1968-69. During this second tour he was injured in a helicopter crash. Despite his own injuries, he managed to rescue his comrades from the burning helicopter and was awarded the Soldier's Medal. In all, he has received 11 decorations, including the Legion of Merit.

Powell earned an MBA at George Washington University in Washington, DC, and after being promoted to major, won a White House fellowship. Powell was assigned to the Office of Management and Budget during the administration of President Nixon, and here he made a lasting impression on the Director and Deputy Director of the Office: Casper Weinberger and Frank Carlucci. Both of these men were to call on Powell when they served as Secretary of Defense and National Security Advisor, respectively, under President Reagan.

Powell, now a Colonel, followed his term as White House Fellow with service as a battalion commander in Korea and with a staff job at the Pentagon. After study at the Army War College, he was promoted to Brigadier General and commanded a Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division.



In the administration of President Carter, Powell was an assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and to the Secretary of

Energy. He was promoted to Major General. He again assisted Frank Carlucci at the Defense Department during the transition from the Carter to Reagan administrations.

Powell served as assistant commander and deputy commander of infantry divisions in Colorado and Kansas before returning to Washington to become senior military assistant to Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, whom he assisted during the invasion of Grenada and the raid on Libya.

Powell was called upon to testify before Congress in private session about the covert shipment of American arms to Iran; he was one of only five persons in the Pentagon who knew about the operation. Powell was not implicated in any wrongdoing in the matter.



In 1986, Powell left Washington to serve as commander of the Fifth Corps in Frankfurt, Germany, but was recalled to Washington to serve as deputy to Frank Carlucci, after Carlucci was appointed national security adviser in the wake of the Iranian arms scandal. A year later, Carlucci was appointed Secretary of Defense and Powell, now a Lieutenant General, became the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. In this capacity, he coordinated technical and policy advisers during President Reagan's summit meetings with Soviet President Gorbachev. He was the first African -American to serve in this position, as he has been in every office he has held since.

In 1991, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Bush, Powell became a national figure during the successful Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations which expelled the Iraqi army from Kuwait.

General Powell continued as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the first months of the Clinton administration, publicly disagreeing with the President's plan to permit gay men and women to serve in the military, although he eventually accepted a compromise on the issue. Powell retired from the military shortly thereafter and returned to private life.



In 1994, Powell joined former President Carter and Senator Sam Nunn on a last-minute peace-making expedition to Haiti, which resulted in the end of military rule and the peaceful return to power of the elected government of that country.



In his years in public service, General Powell never disclosed his political sympathies; he was registered to vote as an independent. Although he was known to have supported the 1964 campaign of President Lyndon Johnson, a Democrat, he had served in both Republican and Democratic administrations.

The General's great popularity has led many people to urge him to run for President, but thus far he has declined to seek elective office. In 1995 he announced that he had registered as a Republican, and did not forswear future political efforts. He concentrated for the next few years on his work with young people as Chairman of America's Promise: the Alliance for Youth. In 2001, newly elected President George W. Bush appointed Colin L. Powell to be Secretary of State. Powell was the first African-American to hold this office. As Secretary of State, he took a leading role in rallying America's allies and the United Nations to the war against terrorism, and to the enforcement of UN resolutions regarding the disarmament of Iraq. Shortly after President Bush's re-election in 2004, Colin Powell announced his intention to step down as Secretary of State.

This page last revised on Jan 11, 2006 11:03 PDT