

Who is... General Colin Powell?



Colin Powell is a retired four-star general in the United States Army and a United States statesman. He was the United States Secretary of State from 2001-2005, and was the first African American designated to that position.

Early Life

He was born Colin Luther Powell on April 5th, 1937 in Harlem, New York. His parents, Luther and Maud Powell, were Jamaican immigrants.

Powell lived in the South Bronx, attending New York City public schools and graduating from Morris High School in 1954. After graduating high school, Powell attended the City College of New York and studied geology. It was there that he found a renewed sense of purpose in the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps).

Not long after joining, he became commander of his unit and began his illustrious military career. Powell graduated from college in 1958, and was appointed second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. In 1962, Powell married Alma Vivian Johnson, who he met while stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Together they have three children, Michael, Linda, and Annemarie.

Military Career and Accomplishments

Colin Powell was sent to South Vietnam by President John F. Kennedy in 1962 as an adviser. While patrolling the Vietnamese-Laotian border in 1963, Powell was wounded by a punji-stick booby trap. He was awarded a Purple Heart during this first tour of duty and a Bronze Star a year later. During Powell's second tour in Vietnam from 1968-1969, he was injured in a helicopter crash, but was still able to rescue his comrades from the burning helicopter. For this, he was awarded the Soldier's Medal,

one of 11 military decorations he received over the course of his military career, including the Legion of Merit. In 1973, Colonel Powell served a tour of duty in Korea as a Battalion Commander, and later began working at the Pentagon. From 1975-1976, he attended the National War College in Washington D.C. and was promoted to Brigadier General in 1976, commanding the 2nd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. Powell held government positions through multiple presidential transitions; first as an assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Energy, and then promoted to Major General, assisting the Department of Defense. Powell was appointed the National Security Adviser in 1987, where he coordinated technical and policy advisers during summit meetings with Soviet President Gorbachev. In 1989, Powell was named Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by President George H. W. Bush. This is the highest military position in the Department of Defense, and Powell was the first ever African American officer to be awarded that distinction. His role famously played out for the country when he became a national figure during the Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations in Iraq. It was during this time that he developed the "Powell Doctrine," an approach to military conflicts that encourages using overwhelming force in order to maximize success and minimize casualties.

In 1993, Powell retired from the Army, but participated in a last-minute expedition to Haiti in 1994, which resulted in the end of military rule and a return to elected government. In 1995, Powell published his autobiography, "My American Journey", outlining his life both before and after his military career, along with his personal growth. In addition to his time in the military, Powell was Chairman of America's Promise from 1997-2000, a nonprofit organization focused on instilling character and competence in young people.

In 2000, President George W. Bush appointed Powell Secretary of State, for which he was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate. At that time, his rank was the highest in civilian government ever held by an African American. During his term, Powell played a significant role in building the case for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and spent the remainder of his time trying to establish an international coalition to assist in the rebuilding of Iraq before his resignation in 2004.

Name: _____

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1. What branch of service did General Colin Powell serve?

2. How did General Colin Powell begin his military career?

3. How did Powell earn the Soldier's Medal?

4. What is the main purpose of America's Promise Alliance?

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5. What do you feel is General Colin Powell's most important accomplishment and why?

Extension Activities

- A. Write a letter to young Colin Powell. Describe to him all he will accomplish and give him words of inspiration to continue along his path to success.
- B. Hollywood is producing a film on Colin Powell and his illustrious military career. You have been tasked with creating the movie poster depicting all of the most important events in his life. Be sure to include a catchy title, vibrant images, and any other components that might "sell" the movie to potential patrons.
- C. Colin Powell embodies much of what it means to be a veteran. Make your own veteran acrostic poem using what you know about Powell, and other veterans to describe those attributes.

