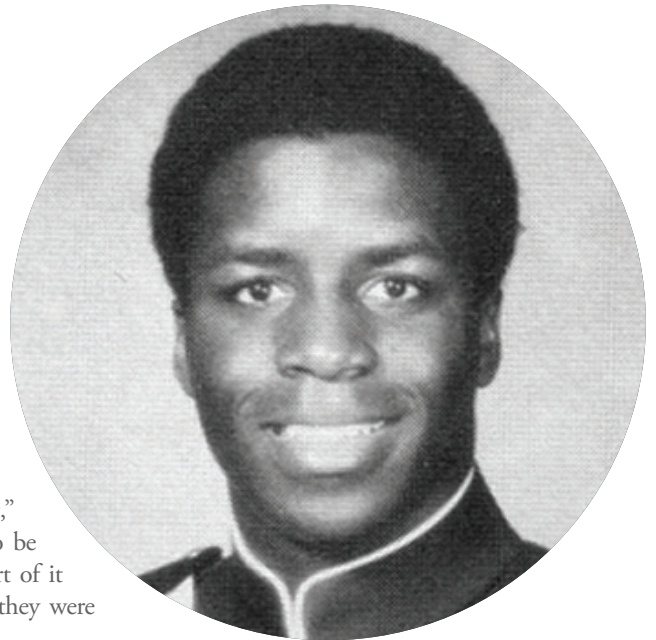




GEN. (RET.) EDWARD RICE JR.

1978



The day started like so many others, with then-Col. Edward A. Rice Jr. '78 about to enter a meeting. He glanced over at a television that was broadcasting a report about an apparent airplane crashing into the World Trade Center.

"Most people thought it was some sort of accident, so I didn't think much about it," he remembers. "By the time I came out of the meeting, the second aircraft had hit and it was clear there was something more going on."

The terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, would be a career-defining moment for Rice and his team members. All of the training he had received as an Air Force officer would be called upon as he took the 28th Bomb Wing from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota to war. Then, suddenly his responsibilities were multiplied.

"I got a call that I was going to be the commander of the bomber forces and tanker forces that were going to support a potential war effort in support of Operation Enduring Freedom," Rice recalls.

His team quickly deployed to the Indian Ocean. As Rice arrived, he had to get his bearings.

"You had lots of people coming in from all over the Air Force and lots of aircraft arriving," he says. "It was really the first time in my career where I sort of reflected back and knew everything that I've learned about leadership to this point was going to be used

in the coming days."

Rice says the task before him appeared overwhelming, but airmen pulled together to get the job done.

"People did what people do and sort of figured it out," he says. "They were excited to be there, were excited to be a part of it and were excited to do what they were trained to do."

Ironically, just a couple years earlier, Rice had been involved in the implementation phase of the new Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept that readied the Air Force for 21st-century warfare. The new concept involved the rapid, forward deployment of forces.

"We had to convince the Air Force and the rest of the world that what we were doing was the right way to go and was going to be a better way for the Air Force moving forward," he recalls.

The concept proved to be effective with Enduring Freedom and the many conflicts that followed.

"When you look back on the things that you were a part of, that was one of the things I'm most proud of because it's enduring in the Air Force today," he admits. "It's proven itself over the test of time."

Due to his role during those initial months of Enduring Freedom, Rice was pre-

sented the Moller Trophy as the most outstanding wing commander in Air Combat Command. It ended up being just one of many honors during and after his 35-year military career.

His latest honor — 2019 Distinguished Graduate Award recipient — is now one of his most prized awards.

"To be included with that group of people — both those who have been selected and whom I know very well could be selected — is tremendously humbling," he admits. "I'm very grateful for the honor."

Career Track

Rice grew up in an Air Force family. From an early age, he was academically inclined, but also was involved in student government, band and orchestra. He competed in track and football as well. He also met his wife of

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40 years, Teresa, during this period — when they were both 12. (He credits her and their two children, Matthew and Kristen, with giving him the support he needed to meet the many challenges that would lie ahead.)

When it came time to decide on a college, Rice’s father happened to bring home some literature about the Air Force Academy.

“I always say he put it where I could find it,” Rice smiles. “He denies it.”

Almost immediately, Rice connected with USAFA, its mission and its honor code. His initial goal was just to be a cadet, not to become a pilot.

“I read about the challenge the Academy presented, and I knew that it was academically rigorous,” he remembers. “Later, flying came into the picture.”

The Boot Fiasco

Like many USAFA graduates, Rice says his first day on campus is filled with memories.

He remembers standing in endless lines to gather his uniforms and necessary equipment.

By the end of the day, he was relieved to have survived. Then came word that the basic cadets should soak their boots in water so they could more easily be broken in the next day.

“Only to discover that, with all the things that I had collected, I didn’t have any boots,” Rice cringed.

Rice had to run the gauntlet of upper-classmen in the hall to report to his element leader that he was without boots.

“Not a strong start to my cadet career,” he laughs. “It was all sort of uphill from there.”

Despite the rocky start, Rice says he quickly adjusted to military life and found many leadership opportunities awaited him as a cadet.

Beginning as early as his three-degree year, Rice had opportunities to lead fellow cadets and hone his people skills.

His leadership track culminated in leadership positions as a second-degree cadet and then as Fall Cadet Wing commander during his firstie year. The leadership team he assembled made the experience a positive one.

“It was a lot of hard work and additional responsibility, but it certainly laid a good foundation for me as I moved on into the Air Force in subsequent years,” he states.

Lessons for Life

By the time he graduated, Rice says he had a stable of new skills from which to draw upon. The most important, he claims, was “no excuses.”

“We all learned those three words, no excuse sir, fairly early on,” he says. “It’s very easy to find a way to make excuses for not getting something done; but if you have the

attitude that you’re going to find a way or make a way, it can really shape the way you approach life and the many challenges you will face.”

Attitude in general was another important lesson, he adds.

“Maintaining a positive attitude is really important,” he says. “You either believe you can do something, or you believe you can’t do something. If you believe you can, you have a chance. If you believe you can’t, then you’re right.”

Other key skills were time management and the power of delegation. As Cadet Wing commander, Rice at first thought he had to make all the final decisions.

“At the end of the day, there was a long line of people outside my door waiting for me to make a decision on something,” he says. “My vice commander was downtown visiting his girlfriend because he had delegated all of his work to other people. I soon figured out that one way was better than the other.”

Pilot Days

Rice went to Williams Air Force Base in Arizona for pilot training, then eventually was assigned to the B-52G in support of the nuclear Air Force. He would later upgrade to instructor pilot.

“I think going into the Strategic Air Command and into bombers was a fortunate, good match for me,” Rice reports. “You never know what you’re meant to do in life. But that ended up being — even though it wasn’t what I wanted to do — something that was a good fit.”

From there, Rice transitioned into standardization and evaluation.

During the flying phase of his military career, Rice amassed more than 4,000 flying hours in the B-1B, B-52G/H, E-3 (AWACS), B-2, KC-135, C-130H, T-37 and T-38.

“When the B-1 first came out, my goal was to try to get a flight in one someday, because I thought it was the most beautiful aircraft I had ever seen,” he says. “Flying the B-1 was probably the most enjoyable of them all.”

Public Policy

In 1990, Rice was chosen for the White House Fellow program.

LEFT: Cadet Wing Commander C1C Edward Rice.

RIGHT: Then-Col. Edward Rice poses with President Bill Clinton during a trip on Air Force One.

BOTTOM: Gen. (Ret.) Ed and Teresa Rice, along with their children Kristen and Matthew.

“I filled out the application and, quite frankly, didn’t think that I would get it,” Rice remembers.

He was assigned to the Department of Health and Human Services for the year, serving under President George H.W. Bush.

Seven years later, he would return to the White House as the deputy executive secretary for the National Security Council under President Bill Clinton. Rice’s position required him to review and filter information for the president and his cabinet as they attempted to make important decisions.

“There’s nothing like serving in the West Wing of the White House,” he says. “I’m not sure I would call it fun, because it was the most intense environment I’ve ever been in. It was intense enough that I was ready to go after two years.”

Rice says he was impressed with how quickly decisions were made while in the White House. As an Air Force officer, he’d grown comfortable with the deliberative process through which most decisions were made.

“It was initially surprising to me how quickly things happened there,” he says, “but it was a good lesson that when you have really good people, you can let go and depend on them to get things done.”

Staff Work

Rice alternated between command assignments and staff assignments, both with increasing responsibility, as the years rolled on.

As his career wound down, Rice spent six years in the Pacific in a variety of roles, including commander of U.S. Forces Japan as a lieutenant general. His current home in San Antonio is filled with beautiful oriental art and furniture procured during his time overseas.

“If we’d spent one more year in the Pacific, we’d have gone native and probably never come back,” he says. “It was tremendous.”

His final assignment, which came with a fourth star, was commander of Air Education and Training Command at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph.

“At some point in my career, I realized that the only prerequisite for my next job was that I knew very little about it,” he laughs. “I was going into experiences that I didn’t have a lot of deep experience in. But I was very grateful for the opportunity to lead at that level.”

During his tenure, Rice and his team accomplished a lot, including the initial training for the F-35, the establishment of a joint medical and education training campus, and the launch of the training program for the Saudi Air Force. He also had to deal with a major sex scandal within Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base.

“We worked really hard to resolve that in a satisfactory manner,” he admits.

Looking back over his military career, Rice says he’s thankful for the variety of assignments he enjoyed.

“I majored in engineering, but I don’t think I would have been satisfied only being an engineer in my career,” he says. “One of the great things about the Air Force is the variety of experiences that you have, and I was fortunate to have more than my share.”

Next Chapter

In retirement, Rice has remained incredibly busy. He has served as a consultant and advisor to private industry and foreign governments. He’s also been heavily involved in nonprofit work — most notably with the United Way of San Antonio.

Rice was appointed by President Barack Obama and reappointed by President Donald Trump to serve on the USAFA Board of Visitors. For the past three years, he’s been the board chairman.

“It’s helped me get more engaged in what’s going on with the Academy,” he says of his volunteer role. “I’m just very impressed with what’s going on at the Academy these days.”

Additionally, Rice is a governing trustee of the Falcon Foundation, which provides highly motivated men and women a second chance to attend USAFA.



“I think this idea of service was just part of my DNA and my makeup,” he says. “I think it’s important that everybody tries to give back to something in some way.”

But Rice’s contributions aren’t finished just yet. He’s committed to continuing his nonprofit and consulting work.

A key project for him and his USAFA classmates is the planned Center for Cyber Innovation.

“I think this center is going to be a really important addition to what we do at the Academy,” he says. “I’m happy to be part of the class that’s trying to help financially support that to get it built.”

