

Remembering the Late Retired GEN Gordon R. Sullivan

GEN Sullivan died Jan. 2, 2024, at 86. With his foresight, wisdom, and professionalism, he helped shape the Army we now know today. He is beloved by the Armor community and is the namesake of the Sullivan Cup biannual international tank competition.

He was born in Boston Sept. 25, 1937, and grew up in nearby Quincy, MA. He was commissioned in the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant of armor in 1959. After a tour in Korea from June 1961 to August 1962, he volunteered for Vietnam. He was first sent to the Military Advisor Training and Assistance course at Fort Bragg (now Fort Liberty), NC, and he also received Vietnamese language training at the Defense Language Institute, at the Presidio in California. In January 1963, he arrived for his first of two tours in Vietnam.

He later commanded the 4th Battalion, 73rd Armor and the 1st Brigade, 3rd Armored Division, followed by an assignment as 3rd Armored Division's Chief of Staff and the VII Corps Operations Officer. He then served as the assistant commandant of the Armor School at Fort Knox, KY from November 1983 to July 1985. He went on to be the deputy commandant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS from March 1987 to June 1988.

GEN Sullivan commanded the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Riley, KS from June 1988 to July 1989. He next served as the deputy chief of staff for operations and plans and Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1990 to 1991. He culminated his Army career as the 32nd Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1991 to 1995.

As the 32nd Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, GEN Sullivan led the Army's complex transition from its Cold War posture, a period that saw the downsizing of the Army by 600,000 Soldiers, while striving to maintain readiness, morale, and a sense of purpose. He helped pave the way for the integration of fast-moving technological advances across the Army. He also saw the Army deploy for contingencies to Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and the Balkans, and for disaster assistance operations in response to Hurricane Andrew.

In August 1993, President Bill Clinton assigned the duties and responsibility of acting Secretary of the Army to Sullivan while he continued to serve as Chief of Staff. GEN Sullivan retired from the Army in July 1995 after more than 36 years of service.

From February 1998 through June 2016, he was the president and chief executive officer of the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA). He saw his time at AUSA as an extension of his Army service, "I saw my work here as a continuation of my 36 years in the Army, building leaders, supporting the troops, facing whatever challenges the world creates," said GEN Sullivan. In 2016, he received the GEN George Catlett Marshall Medal, AUSA's highest award, for his lifetime of selfless service to the Army and the nation.

Following his time at AUSA, Sullivan continued to serve, as board chairman of the Army Historical Foundation. During his time as chairman, he led the campaign to build the National Museum of the U.S. Army at Fort Belvoir, VA. This important museum opened in November 2020.

Sullivan earned a master's of arts degree in political science from the University of New Hampshire. His professional military education includes the U.S. Army Armor School's basic and advanced courses, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College. In addition to his numerous military awards and decorations, he also received the prestigious West Point Association of Graduates' Sylvanus Thayer Award, and he was a member of the Sergeants Major Academy's Hall of Honor. GEN Sullivan also co-authored a book titled, ***Hope Is Not a Method***, which chronicles the enormous challenges encountered in transforming the post-Cold War U.S. Army through the lens of proven leadership principles and a commitment to shared values.

