

General John M.D. Shalikashvili

Biography

General John M.D. Shalikashvili was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1936; he was the first foreign-born American Soldier to serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During WW-II, he experienced that city's destruction in 1944. With his siblings and his parents, he emigrated to Peoria, Illinois in 1952. Like thousands of post-war refugees, the family experienced the difficulties of assimilating into a new culture: "I spoke a little bit [of English]. But not much beyond 'yes' and 'no' and 'what time is it?' And the stories that subsequently have been told that I learned English by watching John Wayne movies is only a little bit of a stretch... As school was over [at Peoria High School], I would run to the local movie theater. There I would sit through movies in order to learn English. In those days movies didn't start at a specific time and end at a specific time, but they would roll continuously... The first time through it wouldn't make much sense to me. But the second time through, it would begin to make a little more sense. Now in my memory, that is probably very faulty, a lot of those movies were John Wayne movies or at least were Wild West movies." General Shalikashvili entered the U.S. Army as a Private after receiving his draft notice in 1958; he completed Officer Candidate School and was commissioned, in Field Artillery, in 1959. During a distinguished military career that covered 38 years, he served in every level of unit command from platoon to division. His efforts, in command of Operation: PROVIDE COMFORT, required intense negotiations with the Turkish government as well as difficult face-to-face meetings with the Iraqi military. He was nominated as Chairman by President William J. Clinton in 1993 and held office until 1997. General Shalikashvili passed away in 2011.

