

Ambassador George Southall Vest Artillery OCS Class 23-42

Ambassador George Southall Vest, former Director General of the United States Foreign Service, US Ambassador to the European Community, and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, is one of only sixty Foreign Service Officers to reach the rank of Career Ambassador in the history of the US Foreign Service.

George Vest was born in Columbia, Virginia, the son of Nancy Margaret (Robertson) and The Rev. George Southall Vest. He was educated at the Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, and the University of Virginia, where he graduated with a B.A. in 1941.

Volunteering for the United States Army after graduation, Vest participated in the North African landings in 1942, and served as a forward artillery observer in the Italian campaign in US Army's advance up the spine of Italy. He left the Army in 1946, having attained the rank of captain.

Vest returned to the University of Virginia and received an M.A. in 1947.

In 1947, Vest joined the United States Foreign Service. His first post was as a consular officer in Hamilton, Bermuda. He said later that it was the only time in his career that he "wore the proverbial striped pants". In 1949, he became a consular officer in Quito, a post he held until 1952, at which time he went to Canada as a political officer at the Embassy of the United States in Ottawa.

In 1954, Vest became the Canadian Desk officer at the United States Department of State in Washington, D.C.; he later served as special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs.

In 1959, Vest was posted to Paris as a political officer at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, where he served as Political Advisor to US General Lauris Norstad, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and, in 1960, as a political officer with the United States mission to NATO. He was then Chief of the Private Office for the Secretary General of NATO (Dirk Stikker) from 1961 to 1963.

Vest spent 1963-1964 studying at the Naval War College.

In 1965–1967, he was deputy director of the State Department's Office of Atlantic Political-Military Affairs. In 1967, he moved to Brussels as Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States Mission to the European Commission, a post he held until 1969, when he became Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States Mission to NATO in Brussels. Vest spent 1972–1973 as chief negotiator to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which led to the Helsinki Accords signed in 1975.

Vest returned to Washington, D.C., in 1973 to become Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Press Relations for Henry Kissinger. In 1974, President of the United States Richard Nixon nominated Vest as Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs; he subsequently held this office from April 29, 1974, until March 27, 1977. On

April 7, 1977, President Jimmy Carter nominated Vest as United States Ambassador to Pakistan, but this nomination was withdrawn on May 5, 1977. Carter then nominated Vest as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs and Vest held this office from June 16, 1977, until April 14, 1981.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan nominated Vest as United States Ambassador to the European Communities. He held this post until 1985, when Reagan named Vest Director General of the Foreign Service; he held this office from June 8, 1985, until May 3, 1989. Vest was made a Career Ambassador in 1987.

Vest retired in 1989 and remained a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He died in August 2021 at the age of 102.