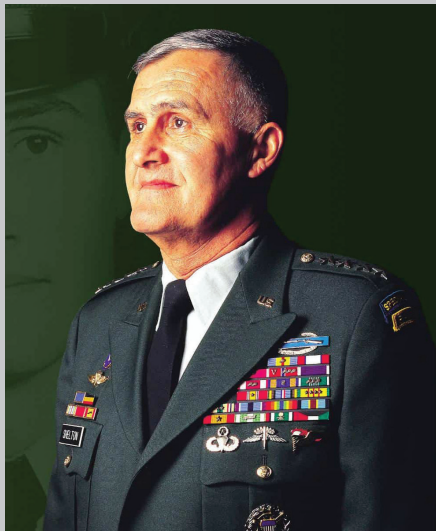


# DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**GENERAL  
HENRY HUGH SHELTON**

*14th Chairman of the  
Joint Chiefs of Staff*

**Inducted April 10, 2026**



Hugh Shelton was born Jan. 2, 1942, in Tarboro, North Carolina, and grew up on a farm near the town of Speed. After graduating from North Edgecombe High School, he attended North Carolina State University, where he participated in the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, or ROTC. Upon graduating in June 1963 with a bachelor's degree in textile technology, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve.

Lieutenant Shelton's first two years on active duty were at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he served as a platoon leader with the 2nd Infantry Division followed by the 1st Cavalry Division. During that time, he completed the prestigious Ranger course, qualified as a parachutist and was promoted to first lieutenant. After a brief return to civilian life, he found he preferred military service and returned to active duty in 1966.

He was soon assigned to Special Forces in Vietnam. From 1966 to 1967, he served with the 5th Special Forces Group, conducting cross-border operations to impede the flow of men and supplies from North Vietnam through Laos into South Vietnam. He promoted to captain and commanded Detachment A-104, working with the South Vietnamese Special Forces and local Montagnard tribesmen to disrupt Viet Cong infiltration across the Laotian border. He received a Purple Heart after a poisoned punji stake drove through his leg and was awarded the Bronze Star for valor for leading the repulse of Viet Cong that attacked one of his South Vietnamese patrols.

After his Special Forces tour, Capt. Shelton was assigned to the Army Training Center at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He returned to Vietnam in 1969 as an intelligence officer and later a company commander with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade.

Throughout the 1970s, Shelton continued his military education and advanced through the ranks. In 1973, he graduated from the Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and earned a master's degree in political science from Auburn University.

Following his time in Alabama, Shelton went to the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. He held various staff positions and was promoted to major in 1974. After his next assignment with the Army Military Personnel Center in Alexandria, Virginia, Maj. Shelton was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1978. He took command of the 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry, at Fort Lewis, Washington, in 1979.

In the 1980s, his career accelerated. After attending the National War College, he was promoted to colonel and commanded the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, followed by Chief of Staff of the 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, New York. After his selection for brigadier general, he served on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Brig. Gen. Shelton, then with the 101st Airborne Division, commanded a deep helicopter assault into Iraq. The division was poised to block Iraqi units fleeing to Baghdad when the war ended.

Over the next five years, Shelton held two of the Army's most prestigious commands. In 1991, he became the commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division and was promoted to major general. In 1993, he was promoted to lieutenant general and took command of the XVIII Airborne Corps. In this role, he gained national prominence for leading the 1994 multinational operation that restored Haiti's democratically elected government.

Shelton received his fourth star on March 1, 1996, and became commander in chief of the U.S. Special Operations Command. He led the command during a period of greatly increased demand for special operations forces worldwide. During his tenure, the largest operational commitment of special operations forces was to the peacekeeping mission in the Balkans.

On Oct. 1, 1997, Gen. Shelton became the 14th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the first with a special operations background. As chairman, he endorsed using overwhelming force when committing American troops to combat and made military readiness a top priority. He successfully advocated major reforms to improve military pay and retirement. He also oversaw the establishment of the U.S. Joint Forces Command to improve joint doctrine and force preparation.

In May 2000, Gen. Shelton released "Joint Vision 2020," a strategic plan for transforming the military to dominate future operations. He identified asymmetric threats, such as terrorism, as the nation's most serious near-term danger. This was underscored months later when al-Qaida terrorists attacked the USS Cole in a Yemeni harbor.

Following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Gen. Shelton spent his final weeks in office coordinating the initial military response to destroy al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan and help to develop an interagency strategy to defeat, disrupt, and degrade terrorist activities around the world. These endeavors would become known as Operation Enduring Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism.

After retiring with more than 38 years of service, he was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal. He has since served as executive director of the Gen. Hugh Shelton Leadership Center at North Carolina State University and has held positions with several corporations.