

Major General James L. "El Jefe" Price

1921 - 1973

General James L. Price was born in 1921, in Hornersville, Mo., and graduated from high school in Bakersfield, Calif., in 1940. He earned a bachelor of science degree in military science from the University of Maryland in 1952; a master of business administration degree from Syracuse University in 1957; and a master of arts degree in international affairs from The George Washington University (National War College) in 1964.

His military career began with his enlistment in the Army Air Forces in 1940. He graduated from flying school at Yuma Field, Ariz., and received his pilot wings and commission as second lieutenant in July 1943. From April 1944 to June 1945 he served in the European Theater of Operations as pilot and operations officer with the 721st Bombardment Squadron.

In June 1945 he returned to the United States and went to Hensley Field, Texas, where he served as operations officer and base air inspector. He was assigned to Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., in February 1947, as pilot and later served as base operations officer.

General Price went to Germany in September 1948 and was assigned to the 61st Troop Carrier Group, U.S. Air Forces in Europe, as operations and training officer and was flight commander in the Berlin Airlift. From July 1949 to October 1951 he served with the 86th Fighter Bomber Group as pilot and then group adjutant.

His association with Aerospace Defense Command began in October 1951 when he was assigned as assistant operations officer and later wing operations staff officer with the 33d Fighter Interceptor Wing at Otis Air Force Base, Mass. He attended the University of Maryland from January 1952 to August 1952 and then returned to Otis Air Force Base as assistant operations officer, 4707th Defense Wing (ADC).

In May 1953 he went to Brunswick, Maine, as commander, 654th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron (ADC). In March 1955 he was assigned as commander, 47th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (ADC), 15th Fighter Group, at Niagara Falls, N.Y. He attended Syracuse University from September 1956 to November 1957.

General Price next went to Taiwan and served as assistant chief, Plans and Programs, Thirteenth Air Force, until July 1958, when he went to Guam as operations staff officer with the 327th Air Division and then as commander, 41st Fighter Interceptor Squadron.

He returned to the United States in September 1959 and was assigned as director of operations and training, 28th Air Division (ADC) at Hamilton Air Force Base, Calif. He was appointed commander of the 456th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Castle Air Force Base, Calif., in July 1960. In August 1963 he entered the National War College, Washington, D.C.

Douglas Fahlander writes:

Up until the arrival of Lt. Col. Price the record of the F-106 was dismal; that of a pigeon rather than that of an eagle. She was a problem bird, besieged by a lousy readiness record and resulting low monthly flying hours. Lt. Col. Price and staff, Lt. Col. Joe Mentecki, Maj. Peacock, and Capt. Merle Gresham, knew how to solve problems, and we were flying the F-106 over 500 hours per month; the first squadron in the Air Force to do so. Under the leadership of "El Jefe" the 456 FIS won William Tell - 1961, the ADC "A" Award, and a Presidential Unit Citation. We were a proud crew who would do anything for Col. Price and company because they would do anything for us.

In August 1964 General Price was assigned to Headquarters Air Defense Command, Ent Air Force Base, Colo., as chief, Weapons Division, Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations. He went to the Republic of Vietnam in May 1966 and served for a year as commander, 505th Tactical Control Group. His next assignment was as vice commander, 57th Fighter Group (ADC), Paine Field, Wash., and in July 1967 he became commander.

General Price was assigned to the Air Defense Weapons Center, Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., in January 1968 as vice commander. He became commander in June 1968.

He became deputy chief of staff, operations, Headquarters Aerospace Defense Command in July 1971.

His military decorations and awards include the Silver Star, Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, and Air Force Outstanding Unit Award Ribbon.

He was promoted to the temporary grade of major general effective Nov. 1, 1971, with date of rank Jan. 23, 1968.

Change in assignment to commander, 21st NORAD/CONAD region, with additional duty of commander, 21st Air Division, Aerospace Defense Command, Hancock Field, N.Y., effective Feb. 15, 1972.

Died May 15, 1973 when his jet F-106A 59-0021 was hit by lightning during takeoff at Griffiss AFB NY.