

SYNOPSIS

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Tentative Title:
**The Day I Lost President Ford:
Memoir of a Born-and-Bred Carolina Tar Heel**



**Author with President Ford in New York Harbor,
Bicentennial Day, July 4, 1976**

by Wilbur D. Jones, Jr.
Wilbur Jones Compositions, LLC
joneswd@ec.rr.com
(O) 910-793-6393
(Cell) 910-612-4749
www.wilburjones.com

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Wilbur Jones, a Tar Heel born and bred, entered life on July 9, 1934, in Wilmington, N. C. Clearly remembering the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and living in wartime boomtown Wilmington during World War II, his absorption with the war news, playing war games, and fascination with ubiquitous soldiers, incubated a lifelong admiration of the armed forces and devotion to serving our country. This path led to one of his five full-time and part-time career channels. Of everything he learned in school, how to write properly emerged as the most useful. This passion launched him into myriad successes in history preservation, education, foreign travel, and community service, which persist today. Perhaps he represents the “forgotten generation” of those born in the Great Depression who nevertheless succeeded.

Following graduation from the University of North Carolina in 1955, where he played varsity lacrosse and soccer, he earned an ensign’s commission at the Navy Officer Candidate School. He embarked on a twenty-eight year career, fourteen each on active duty and in the Ready Reserve, and achieved the rank of captain. Senator Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign enticed him into a seventeen-year career in California and national staff politics, highlighted by staff service to two congressmen, two presidential cabinet secretaries in Washington, directing President Nixon’s 1972 New Hampshire campaign, and as assistant and advance representative in the White House to President Gerald Ford. His memoir is loaded with perhaps unfamiliar historic information on the 1972 and 1976 presidential campaigns.

Jones’s twelve-year foray into armed forces academia as a professor and associate dean at the Defense Acquisition University was his longest career tenure. It included two detached duty assignments to the Under Secretary of Defense and a grand total of seven-and-one-half years serving in the Pentagon. Meanwhile, Jones enjoyed a moonlighting career as a professional NCAA baseball umpire and basketball official.

Once retired from the Department of Defense after nearly forty-one years, he moved back to Wilmington. Immediately he became the leader and catalyst for preserving North Carolina WWII history through his abilities to organize, write, speak, and lead. His 12-year-plus project to have Wilmington designated as the first “American WWII Heritage City” culminated in 2019 when President Trump signed S.47 into law establishing the national preservation program he originated. Meanwhile, he traveled the globe leading WWII battlefield tours.

OVERVIEW

Grounded in his beginning and the era in which he grew up, Jones was destined to be a military historian and armed forces officer in service to our country ...

... and a writer.

Therefore, his memoir reflects how a foundation in core values, character, dedication, and patriotism have guided his working career, family and personal life, successes, and recovering from failures.

Moving the President

Moving the president of the United States from the White House to an event, whether locally or globally, requires the extraordinary amalgamation and coordination of extremely detailed planning, absolute teamwork, and timely precision. To someone attending a campaign rally, the president just shows up. But how? While the process appears complex, the logic is quite simple. In this duty he confidently succeeded.

Its term is “advancing,” meaning a team of White House and federal agency staffers plan it from the intended destination, put together the pieces, get White House approval, and move into action. Then, avoid surprises, check and re-check details, communicate, be constantly alert, and follow through. The president and traveling staff know what to expect and are led through the evolutions by the advance team.

Directing this process is the White House lead advancement, a mature, seasoned political operative who is the president’s direct site representative. Other essential advance team members include the Secret Service, White House Communications Agency, and the White House press office.

Jones served President Gerald Ford as such a White House advancement for more than two years. His inside, in-depth description of the Ford advance machine, its composition, challenges, procedures, and operations, examine this unfamiliar player in presidential political history. In listing his forty-nine Ford events, he selected nine favorite advances divulging tantalizing details, such as the book’s intriguing title.

Jones’s close relations with Ford topped a seventeen-year career in staff politics, which began as a volunteer during Senator Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign. He served as chief of staff for two California Republican congressmen (and helped elect Barry Goldwater, Jr.) and assistant to two presidential cabinet secretaries

of Housing & Urban Development. The list of people with whom he conducted business, along with other in-and-out character connections, reads like opening a time capsule. Noteworthy is his involvement in President Richard Nixon's 1972 re-election and link to the Watergate break-in caper.

The Book's Title

The title happened on Bicentennial Day, the nation's 200th birthday, July 4, 1976, on board the USS *Nashville* in New York Harbor on the Hudson River during a steady, light rain. As the advancement man, he stayed at President Ford's side out on deck during the ceremonies. Here's Jones's description as he made notes.

"First cardinal rule of advancement. Know where the president is.

"My jobs: hold the umbrella over him, check my notes, initiate his movements, keep him on schedule, receive all the items given him, drop nothing, know all answers, stay dry. All were possible, save for dry, because God gave me four extra hands and an extra set of ears that day.

"Let's get inside out of rain, ship's Captain Herbert Dowse must have told president, meet crew on mess deck. Okay, he must have replied, and zip - gone. While three normally reliable staff persons momentarily preoccupied: body man Terry O'Donnell, Secret Service, myself. Stunned, we turned around ten times, where is he? Still raining, soaking wet. Gone for minutes, fifteen, twenty. Holy cow! Where's WHCA, are they with him? Radio check, radio check. Steel ship interference. Hey, you guys seen PASSKEY? (More formally, certainly.) Mild scrambling, searching, rapid heartbeat. I just knew my career was toast.

"I lost the president.

"Eventually White House Communications Agency agent found him in captain's cabin having coffee. Got him, they radioed. Soon here comes president with captain on deck. Rushed over with umbrella. With controlled frantic, "Mr. President, where have you been? We were worried about you." "Hello. Everything's okay, Wilbur, we were having some coffee out of the rain. No problem. You all right?" With that, lifeblood gushed to weary legs, I forgot I was soaked, and regained some composure.

"You comprehending this? Although not supposed to, it did happen. They kept me on payroll."

Life's Credits, Leadership Roles, and Mountain Climbing

Jones credits foundations for his life's achievements, which he labels reaching

“mountaintops,” to his parents’ deep influence and growing up on the WWII home front. Within the title lie other bed rocks such as Goldwater, Nixon, Ford, the Navy, service to country, and playing two UNC varsity contact sports.

To overcome unemployment four times while supporting his wife and children, he maintained this principal credo: *Never Give Up*, emboldening him in all transactions.

“Mountaintops” might also be the book’s title, because he climbed many to achieve countless positive achievements serving our country. Mostly small mountains, not the Rockies, some in-between, but significant symbolism nevertheless.

Through his work ethic and dogged determination, Jones embarked on multiple prominent careers. Frequently portions overlapped. Besides the obligatory formative years, his memoir groups them below into five career channels which easily collate the story, teasing readers with quick snippets written in the first person.

In sum, the memoir delineates a strait-laced, multi-directional working life expanding the term “diverse.” Varied, checkered, eighty-five-plus years of “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy,” as the esteemed John Le Carre might say. Meaning: a lifetime traveling many divergent roads through success and failure, but with the strength to learn and bounce back, and envision and plan for the future.

Most of Jones’s positions involved leadership and management roles, excelling in an ability to work with others - teamwork. Chairman of one, president or executive director of another. Those important, visible positions generated unlimited opportunities to serve and succeed for community, state, and country. Someone in command recognized he could do the job, and gave him the appropriate responsibility, reins, and authority. Other leadership positions he created himself to fill voids and needs. All positions built upward on each other, uncovering additional service opportunities.

Formulating Five Career Channels

This memoir gives Jones the first time to formulate these career channels into those mountaintops. His backbone proudly consists of perseverance and a willingness and desire to work hard, be decisive, and never stopping to be simply satisfied, or wonder what would have happened “if.” What’s next? he asks. Let’s go. Perhaps the reader sees a mirror image.

Perfecting a vast writing background, starting in the eighth grade, his warm, conversational style translates into easy, comfortable reading. He offers lighthearted, fresh, sprightly views employing both serious and carefree vignettes and anecdotes

through fascinating experiences, and Oh-My-Gosh moments. For instance, readers will fantasize about the Mediterranean storybook romance with his future wife (his boss's daughter) and their Naples marriage. Much time is spent laughing at himself and his mistakes, and admitting failures.

But, readers will not be diverted to retrospective policy-wonk blathering, esoteric world views, scandalous exposes, second guessing, palace politics, or overreaching judgments. Nothing necessarily weighty. Just facts from memory, his personal papers collection at the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Randall Library, and verifying others via Google.

A note: Jones sticks to history, much of which he made, and avoids any connections to or comments concerning today's national issues or politics.

Once readers finish, he cares only that his life's journey has enriched them, whether or not they remember the author's name. The story's information, contribution to history, and reading pleasure are what matters.