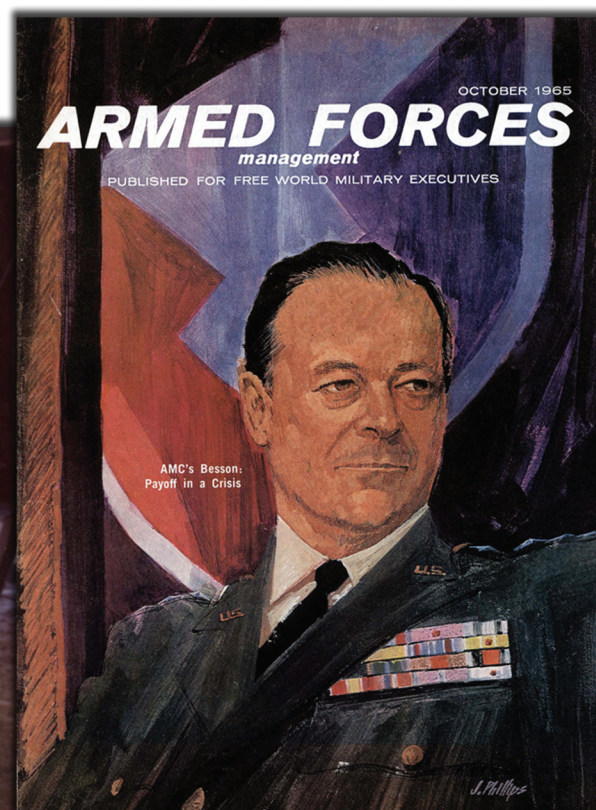


## General Frank S. Besson, Jr.



Frank S. Besson, Jr., was born on 30 May 1910 in Detroit, Michigan. He graduated second in his class from the United States Military Academy in 1932. In 1935, he received a Master's degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His early career was noted for the role he played in the development of portable military pipelines, steel airplane landing mats, and steel treadway bridges. He is credited with the studies which led to the Army's adoption of the Bailey Bridge which was used extensively in all theaters during World War II.

As Director of the Third Military Railway Service in Iran during 1944 and 1945, Besson was charged with ensuring the vital flow of war materials to the Russian forces through the Persian Corridor. While in this assignment, he was promoted to Brigadier General, becoming at 34, the youngest General Officer in the Army Ground Forces.

Toward the end of World War II, General Besson held a key position as Deputy Chief Transportation Officer of Army Forces in the Western Pacific, and when the collapse of Japan was imminent, was ordered to assume complete control of railroads in Japan. During the first year of occupation, General Besson directed the rehabilitation of the Japanese rail system, and moved more than 200,000 troops of the Eighth Army and 150,000 tons of supplies in the first two months. General Robert L. Eichelberger, Eighth Army Commander, commented that "his supervision of the operation of the entire Japanese rail system during the first year of our occupation was the greatest single factor in the results we attained."

Subsequent assignments included a tour in Europe as Assistant Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe, where General Besson formulated logistics plans and overall programs to meet the complex requirements of the fifteen nations of the NATO alliance. His efforts in instituting a system for "costing out" 5-year programs, thereby bringing Force goals into consonance with available resources, earned him the first Distinguished Service Medal to be awarded at SHAPE headquarters.

A life-long pioneer of many transportation innovations, General Besson stimulated both military and commercial adoption of containerization and improved water terminal practices. He introduced the roll-on/roll-off technique for the rapid loading and discharge of wheeled and tracked vehicles. He further refined these concepts upon assuming command of the Transportation Center and School at Fort Eustis, Virginia, in 1953. General Besson became Chief of Transportation for the U.S. Army in March 1958, a position he held until 2 April 1962, when he took charge of the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC).

As the first AMC Commander, General Besson was charged with consolidating six Army technical service organizations into a single command without disrupting effective materiel support for the Army. His success resulted in his receiving the Merit Award of the Armed Forces Management Association in 1963. On 27 May 1964, Besson became the 75th officer in the U.S. Army's 189-year history to wear the four stars of a full general. He was the first Army officer to achieve that rank as head of a logistical organization in peacetime. During his command of AMC, this mammoth logistical organization, with an annual budget exceeding \$14 billion and an inventory of \$21 billion, employed more than 160,000 civilian personnel in addition to its military complement of 14,000.

Also during his command, he recognized the emerging tactical importance of Army aviation, establishing the Army Aviation Depot Maintenance activity at Corpus Christi and was instrumental in securing approval for the Army to not only procure its own aircraft but also to do its own research, development, and engineering.

After retirement in 1969, General Besson was recalled to serve as Chairman of the Joint Logistics Review Board, reporting on worldwide logistic support to U.S. forces during the Vietnam conflict. He retired in 1970 after more than 37 years of commissioned service, 25 of them as a general officer.

In 1970, General Besson was appointed by President Nixon as a founding director and first CEO of the National Rail Passenger Corporation, the operators of AMTRAK. He was founder and Director of the Board of Services National Bank of Alexandria, Virginia, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Environmental Research Corporation of Fairfax County, Virginia.

During his career, he received many U.S. and foreign awards and decorations, including the Distinguished Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the Iranian Order of Homayoun Star, Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and the Republic of Korea's Order of the Military Merit, Second Class (Ulchi). He was also inducted into the Army Aviation Hall of Fame in 1986 and was one of the members of the first class who were inducted into the Army Transportation Corps Hall of Fame in 1997. General Besson died on 15 July 1985.