

Military History of James Wesley Smith

Born 19 Aug 1921

Boise, Ada, Idaho

Summer 1940. 3 weeks of active duty. Enlisted as a Private, and took the place of my 1st cousin Avery Thomas who played the base drum in the Idaho 116th Army Engineers Band. He could not go to summer camp at Fort Lewis, Washington and I was asked to take his place, even though I was still in high school. During the encampment the unit was called to active duty. I was allowed to be discharged and return to school.

30 Apr 1941, enlisted as a private in the Army Air Corps. Pay \$21.00 a month. I could see a war was coming, did not have the required 2 years of college to be come an Aviation Cadet. In studying the history of World War, I knew that they had enlisted pilots during that war. I enlisted because I felt they would have enlisted pilots again. I was sent to Vancouver, Washington for uniforms. I was then assigned to Mather Field, California. The base was not open yet, so I was sent TDY to Stockton Army Air Field, California. I worked on the flight line. My serial number 19021064.

June 1941, I was sent to Scott Field, Ill. For training as a radio operator in Morris code, and radio maintenance. I was able to take code at twenty five words a minute, both by hand and typewriter prior to graduation. I graduated from the school three weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Around the 22 December 1941. My vision of enlisted pilots came true that summer, when congress and the President passed the legislation. I then went back to Mather Field (now open), and during my four months there, I was promoted to Corporal. Pay \$45.00 a month.

I was allowed to request training as an enlisted pilot, passing my physical, and board. Thence to Santa Anna, California (a staging area), Hemet California for Primary training, Bakersfield, California for basic training and then the Luke Field, Arizona for Advanced flight training. I was supposed to graduate as a Staff Sargent pilot, but they eliminated that rank and made a new rank of Flight Officer. Basically a Warrant Officer. Our class was the first class of Flight Officer's and my serial number was T-61. Graduated as a Flight Officer 3 Dec 1942. Only about 77 out of 235 students who started (counting physicals and board disqualifications) graduated. Married your Grandmother in the Mesa Temple on 4 Dec 1942.

4 Dec 1942 - Jun 1945. Assigned to Las Vegas Army Air Field. Assigned as an instructor pilot, and initially trained aerial gunners and later copilots in bomber aircraft. I flew the following aircraft during my time there. AT-6, A-33, AT-11, AT-18, B-34, B-26, B-17. 1200 hours in the B-17. Promoted to 2nd Lt, Jun 1944. SN A552377. First son, James Raymond Smith, born at the Las Vegas Army Hospital, 28 Oct 1943.

Mid 1945 - Dec 1945. Reassigned to Roswell AFB, New Mexico for flight training as an Aircraft Commander in the B-29. Then sent to Smoky Hill Air Force, Kansas for phase training prior to being sent to the pacific area of the war. The Japanese surrendered while there. All training was terminated. I had enough points for early release from active duty and was back home in Boise by the end of 1945. I started out in the U S Army Air Corps, then it became the US Army Air Force, and finally after the war, a new separate force, the United States Air Force.

Dec 1945 - 19 Apr 1951. In- active reserve, civilian. Two sons born in Boise. Kenneth Dee Smith, birth 14 Nov 1946, and William Kay Smith, birth 21 Nov 1948. I found a job as an assistant manager at a retail building supply store and did that for two years. Then as a small time building contractor until being recalled to active duty.

Sept 1949, joined the 190th Fighter Squadron of the Idaho Air National Guard after a year wait. Flew AT-6's, F-51 & C-47 at Gowen Field in Boise. I was promoted to 1st Lt. during this period.

Apr 1951, 190th Fighter Squadron called to active duty.

Jun 1951, the 190th Fighter Squadron sent to Moody AFB, Valdosta, Georgia. Returned back to Boise on emergency leave for the birth of our fourth son. Terry Allen Smith, born 4 Aug 1951.

Jul 1951, reassigned to the 305th Bomb Wing, MacDill AFB, Florida. (Strategic Air Command. Refresher training as a Aircraft Commander in the B-29.)

Nov 1951, reassigned to the 307th Bomb Wing (SAC), Kadena AFB, Okinawa. Assigned as an Aircraft Commander of a combat crew whose former Aircraft Commander refused to fly more combat mission. We flew 22 more combat missions into Korea, before the crew completed their missions. I was made an instructor pilot almost immediately after my arrival. As an instructor pilot I flew with new crews arriving from the states. During one of these training sorties, the crew I was checking was lead aircraft of a two ship formation, when the second aircraft on our left side, moved forward, just missed hitting the wing, went through our No. 1 engine, then dropped down and made contact with much of the bottom of our aircraft. We were able to feather the No. 1 engine. I then took over as pilot of the aircraft and returned safely back to Kadena. The other aircraft entered a cloud bank at 15000 feet and spiral crashed into the China Sea. No survivors.

Feb 1952, R & R to Japan for the crew. Also made a Senior pilot during this month.

Apr 1952, missions complete, ordered to fly a B-29 (44-36292) back to McClellan AFB, California. Made stop overs Kwajalein, Hawaii, for crew rest.

May 1952, new assignment to Lake Charles AFB, La. Upon arrival, found I had been promoted to Captain.

June 1952, sent TDY to Forbes Air Force Base with the SAC Instructors Training Wing (25 days).

Dec 1952, about this time decided to make a career out of the service. I had about five years active service, then nearly another five years as a civilian, and now I was approaching 2 years active again. Received next assignment, to the 28th Strategic Recon Wing (SAC), Rapid City AFB, S. Dakota. Training, as a copilot, in the B-36 aircraft. This to be my first experience with jet engines. The B-36 had 6 pusher prop engines mounted on the back of the wing and 4 jet engines.

Jan 1953 - Jan 1955. Reassigned to the 72nd Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SAC) Ramey AFB. Puerto Rico. Copilot for about a year. Made an Aircraft Commander in the RB-36 aircraft on Mar 1955. Our crew was assigned and accomplished the photographing, at 1000 feet, the first complete overlay picture map of Haiti. RB-36 had a 22 man flight crew. Our fifth son, Glenn Stuart Smith, born at the Ramey AFB hospital. Birth 20 Jun 1954.

Oct 1955 - Nov 1958. Reassigned to the 72nd Bombardment Wing (SAC), Loring AFB, Limestone, Maine. Assigned as Aircraft Commander of a Lead crew. Later became a Wing Standardization crew to evaluate other crews' proficiency. Became Chief of the Wing Standardization section as the Wing was changing from the B-36 to the new B-52. Flew the last B-36 out of Loring AFB to Biggs AFB, El Paso, Texas. Sep 1956, prior to going TDY to Castle AFB, Calif. for 80 days training in the new B-52. Was required to get two flights in the all-jet B-47, one flight in the back seat, and the last flight into front seat. I finished No. 1 in ground school testing. My co-pilot was No. 2. I also successfully completed the flight check. This completion our training at Castle AFB and a return to Loring AFB. Jan 1957, assigned as an Aircraft Commander in the B-52 at Loring AFB. Combat Ready crew L-59. While at Loring AFB, changed from a Idaho National Air Guard officer to a USAF reserve officer. Later that year, changed from a USAF reserve officer to appointment as Captain in the Regular Air Force, SN 41657A. Our sixth son, Paul Brent Smith was born 11 Nov 1956 in the Castle AFB hospital.

Dec 1958 - Aug 1963. Reassigned to 4130 Strategic Wing (SAC) Bergstrom AFB, Austin, Texas. Oct 1961 appointed instructor pilot and instrument flight examiner. Aug 1962 assigned special duty as with the Wing Standardization section of the Wing. Spot promoted to Major, 29 Aug 1960. Promoted to temporary grade of Major, 1 Sep 1961. Promoted to permanent grade of Major 19 Aug 1963. TDY Sep 1960 for 75 day to attend Instrument Pilot Instructor Jet Course at James Connally AFB, Waco, Texas. Some time in the sixties, I qualified and was awarded my Command Pilot Wings. Our seventh and last child, Colleen Smith was born 28 Apr 1960 AT the Bergstrom, AFB Hospital.

Aug 1963 - Jun 1964. Reassigned to the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. Graduated 6 Jun 1964. Proficiency flights during our time at the College was in the C-47 aircraft.

Jun 1964 - Mar 1967. Reassigned to the 449th Bomb Wing, Kincheloe AFB, Michigan. Jul 1965 designated instructor in the B-52H aircraft. Crew selected to attend SAC Bomb competition, Fairchild AFB Michigan. Sep 1965 assigned primary duty as Aircraft Commander of crew S-22. Sep 1965 designated as Standardization Evaluation and Instrument Check Pilot. 1966 became chief of the Standardization division. Mar 1967 Crew assigned to participate in the SAC/RAF Bombing Competition "GIANT HAMMER" at the RAF Station, Marham, England. Mar 1966, promoted to Lt./Col.

Mar 1967 - Mar 1970. Reassigned Chief of the Standardization division. Headquarters, 2nd Air Force, Barksdale AFB, La. This 2nd Air Standardization division was responsible for evaluating and monitoring in-flight crew procedures and techniques of thirteen 2nd Air Force Wings.

Mar 1970 - Apr 1971. Assigned to headquarters, 307th Strategic Wing SAC. Uta Pao Air Base, Thailand. Assignment included flying periodically on B-52 combat missions into Viet Nam.

1 May 1971, date of retirement, retired at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

Total service time 30 years, one month, six days. Active service: 24 years, 8 months, 28 days.

I now have nearly 32 years of retirement. Maybe it's time to go back to work again.