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BECOMING AN AIRCRAFT ELECTRICIAN

After three (3) years and seven (7) months on active duty I was discharged from the United States Air Force a Staff Sergeant Aircraft Instrument Mechanic, AFSC 43156, on 3 February 1953 at Bryan Air Force Base, Texas and drove to My Home Of Recorded: Route 1, Byesville, Ohio, arriving there on 4 February 1953 (during my active duty tour I attended two technical schools: Aircraft and Engine and Aircraft Instrument). On the 8th of February 1953 I drove to North American Aviation Inc in Columbus, Ohio applied for a job as an Aircraft Instrument Mechanic and because North American did not use Aircraft Instrument Mechanics I was offered a job as an Aircraft Mechanic, which I accepted. About one month later the General Forman came to me and said the company was in need of Aircraft Electricians and because my records showed that I had training and experience in aircraft electrical systems they would like me to transfer into their Aircraft Electrician career field; I accepted and that started my career and an Aircraft Electrician, Navy style. How I became an Air Force Aircraft Electrician is covered in the following articles.



Marine FJ3 Fury Jets that were made at North American Columbus, Ohio

JOINING THE AIR FORCE RESERVE

On February 1953 the Korean War was going hot and heavy and there were indications that individuals in my draft status would be drafted back into service and if I was I might end up in the Army as a ground pounder; I couldn't handle that so I decide to join the Air Force Reserve rationalizing that if I had to go back in service it would be to the Air Force and as a Staff Sergeant. I went to Fort Hays in down town Columbus, Ohio, where I learned the Air Force Recruiter was located, to enlist in the Reserve. Fort Hayes as a military installation no longer exist, in 1953 it was a small, actually it had always been, military installation that then had mostly offices for the military and the National Guard and where one of the draft induction center was located. I went to the front gate and the guard directed me to where he thought the Air Force Reserve recruiter was located. As I approach a large building that looked like an aircraft hangar, it had never been one, just looked like one, I notice that there were many individuals lined up in front of the building with Marine MP keeping order.

I entered the building through one of the doors distant from where the people were assembled and preceded to a table at the opposite end. As I walked towards the table a Marine Corporal MP came up to me and proceeded to chew me out for getting out of line. I immediately got defensive and asked him "who in the hell do you think you are talking to?" He also got very defensive and belligerent and told me whom he was, to get back in line. I told him, in a very stern and loud voice, "I'm not one of your draftees! Get off my back!" With this he quite down and asked "who are you" and I told him "a Staff Sergeant looking for the Air Force Recruiter". His whole demeanor changed, he apologized for his tone and told me he thought I was one of the draftees that got out of line, that they do it all the time that's why there are so many MP around; he then directed me to the recruiter; I proceeded there and join the Air Force Reserve with no loss in grade. I was issued enlistment orders and a letter to the Supply officer at Lockbourne Air Force Base directing him to issue me a complete set of uniforms. I proceeded there and the Sergeant issuing me the uniforms was surprise that I had not lost a stripe when I reenlisted, he said most people that come there for their uniforms do so; he thought that I had reenlisted in the regular Air Force. Getting issued a new set of uniforms was a surprise sense I enlisted as a Standby Reservist and would not have need of them. Joining the reserves continued my military career that eventually ended, retired, as a Lieutenant Colonel.



The induction center at Fort Hayes

ATTENDING WEEKLY TRAINING CLASSES AT FORT HAYES

The Forman of the Hydraulic crew in our department at North American was a Ready Air Force Reservist and attended weekly training meetings at Fort Hayes and received a day's pay for four hours of training. I don't remember how we got on the subject of the Air Force Reserve but he convinced me to join him in the Ready Reserve unit he belongs to at Fort Hayes. On the first training meeting I attended I got on the wrong side of several "old" Master Sergeants when they made sport of the fact that I was an Instrument Repair Mechanic; they thought that the Air Force wasted money on specialist in general, that any Aircraft Mechanic could do the work. I took issue with that explain that the systems were too complicated, not like they were during World War II, that it took someone with "BRAINS" to maintain them. They persisted in their view, one that I also held but wouldn't admit it, and I persisted in mine. I told them they didn't know what they were talking about. The discussion got a little loud so the instructor, a Master Sergeant, in charge gave us "at ease", meaning shut up, and sit down. After the training was dismissed and everyone was leaving the instructor quietly said to me "your right, the systems on new aircraft is getting too complicated for a pure mechanic to maintain". During the first training meeting I had to fill out several papers and select a time when I wanted to do my fifteen-day active duty for the year. I don't remember the exact days but I do remember it was in the summer several months in the future. I attended the training meeting until we moved to Wilmington and Clinton County Air Force Base; the move by the way was because of my involvement with the ready reserve unit at Fort Hayes, which is another story.

ORDER TO ACTIVE DUTY

I got home one day and Helen handed me a letter from the 2020th Air Reserve Center at Fort Hayes. In it were orders to report to 2252nd Air Reserve Flying Center (ARFC) at Clinton County Air Force Base in Wilmington, Ohio for a period of fifteen (15) days. I had forgotten that I would be required to do a fifteen-day tour as a condition of being a member of the Ready Reserve unit at Fort Hays. I don't remember the exact date; I do remember it was in the summer of 1954, in July maybe, when I was to report. Helen and I decided that she and the baby would go to her mother and dad's house in Byesville for the duration of my active duty; she called them and they were delighted to have them for that length of time. I presented my active duty orders to the Forman at North American and arranged to get one extra day off before I reported in so that I could take Helen and Vikki to Byesville. During my absence North American would continue to pay me; they were great supporters of the Reserves. I took Helen and Vikki to Byesville and from there sort of back tracked to Wilmington on US 22 (there were no interstate roads then); Wilmington is straight south of Columbus about one hundred and twenty five miles and about forty miles north east of Cincinnati. I got to Wilmington and had no trouble finding Clinton County Air Force Base; drove to the gate and asked the guard where I was to report to, he didn't know. I asked him where Field Maintenance was and he pointed to the first building on the left from the gate. I went there and reported in to the Master Sergeant in charge, gave him a copy of my orders, he asked be what my Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) was and I told him that it was 43156. He escorted me to the Instrument Shop and introduced me to the Shop Chief. I asked the Master Sergeant about a bunk and he said, "I don't know about that, you'll have to ask someone else"; I didn't get a bunk until the next day, that night I stayed in the car; I don't know why I never reported to the Headquarters, which I had to the second day there. The guy in charge of the instrument shop, the Shop Chief, was a civilian; he ignored me after I was introduced to him. I asked to be assigned to jobs on aircraft as they came in and he said "no, the regulars will take

care of them”; there were ten Regular Air Force personnel of various rank assigned to the instrument shop, me? I was a Staff Sergeant. From one of the airmen in the shop I found out the Shop Chief didn’t have much use for Reservist, he didn’t think that they were smart enough to work on aircraft.

In 1954 Clinton County Air Force Base (CCAFB) was an active Air Force Base whose mission was to train reservist; the home to the 302nd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW), an Air Force Reserve unit. Back then the reserves did not run the base, the 2252nd Air Force Reserve Training Group a regular Air Force unit whose sole duty was to maintain the base for the reserve unit and train them. There were C46 aircraft, don’t remember how many, two C45 and two C47 Navigator Training aircraft assigned to the base and in reality were 302nd TCW property. It’s kind of difficult to explain the relationship that existed then between the regular Air Force personnel and the reservist; the reserve owned the aircraft but the regulars maintained them; the reservist were on base only once a month during their Unit Training Assembly (UTA) and on active duty for training once a year for fifteen days. The day after I reported in the 302nd TCW personnel showed up for their UTA. In the Field Maintenance Shops the reservist more or less took over the operation, each shop was fully manned with reserve personnel, augmenting the regular Air Force personnel and civilians assigned to do the work, remember the Instrument Shop Chief didn’t trust the reservist to work alone on the aircraft. Me? I didn’t do anything but walk around and drink coffee. During my walking I met Master Sergeant Cooms the 302nd TCW Air Force Reserve Master Sergeant in charge of Field Maintenance. He immediately knew that I wasn’t one of his men and wanted to know who I was. I told him my name that my reserve unit at Fort Hays ordered me down here for my fifteen-day active duty tour and that I worked at North American as an Aircraft Electrician he then asked me if I was getting along OK. I told him “no” that I hadn’t got to work on aircraft yet and that I needed a bunk. He said to me “didn’t they assigned you a bunk when you reported in to headquarters yesterday?” I said, “No, I didn’t report in to headquarters, I came right to Field Maintenance and reported in”. He said, “come with me” and took me to headquarters where he introduced me to a Second Lieutenant, whose name I can’t remember; I was then processed in and assigned a bunk in the transit airmen’s barracks. After processing in I went back to the shops and thanked Master Cooms for his assistance. That ended my second day of active duty. What follows is another story.



Picture of the base I downloaded from the Internet. Note that it is a picture of the base before it was expanded; Ohio 73 is seen crossing the base on the north side (top left hand corner).



One of the 302nd C46 aircraft.
Note the mountains in the background; it's definitely not at CCAFB.

HELPING THE AIRCRAFT ELECTRICAL SHOP

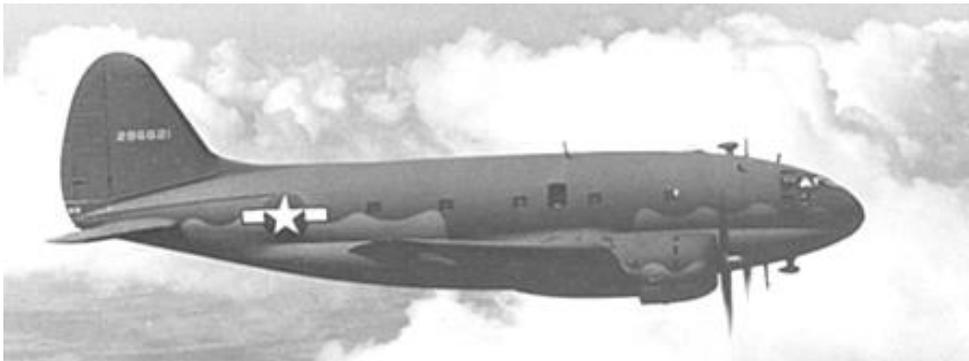
The third day of my 15 day active duty started out much the same as the previous days; I went to the Field Maintenance coffee shop got some coffee and donuts, reported to the Instrument Shop and let Shop Chief know that I was there and went and sat down waiting to be called to go work on some instrument problem on an aircraft; like the previous days that call never happened. Every so often I would go up and volunteer to work on something, which he ignored. I told him that I was going to the coffee shop to refill my cup and he said, "OK"; that he would let me do. At the coffee shop I refilled my cup and got another donut and sat down at one of the tables. Presently a Technical Sergeant came into the room and got some coffee and donuts and sat down next to me and we started talking. He introduced himself as Technical Sergeant Lester, the Aircraft Electric Shop Chief and said to me "you know we aren't supposed to be in here drinking coffee unless it was break time" (brake time was two hours after duty call in the morning an two hours after lunch in the afternoon and we were there after the morning break). I said, "Yes I know. But I don't have anything to do but walk around and to drink coffee". He asked me "how come you have nothing to do?" I told him that the Instrument Shop Chief didn't trust reservist to work on aircraft so here I sit." He said "have you complained to anyone about it?" I told him "no, being a reservist, and one not assigned to the 302nd TCW, I don't think it would do any good". He then asked me what unit I was with and what I did as a civilian and I told him I was assigned to the reserve unit at Fort Hays in Columbus, Ohio and that I worked at North American

Aviation as an Aircraft Electrician. With that he's eyes lit up and asked me if I would be willing to help him with the work load in his shop, that he had more work that he would handle because he was short or qualified Aircraft Electrician, most were airmen that had just reported in from technical school and needed supervision when working on aircraft. I said I would be glad to help but he would have to clear it with someone so that I wouldn't get in trouble. He told me to wait there until he came back and went to talk to his boss, the Active Duty Master Sergeant in charge of Field Maintenance, the guy in charge of all the shops. He came back and told me that the Master Sergeant said that it was OK for me to help him, that he called North American and talked to my Forman about my qualifications (when I reported in I had to make out a form indicating where my next of kin (Helen) could be reached and where I worked and my bosses phone number in case he had to be contacted) and that he talked to the Instrument Shop Chief about his treatment of reservist and told him that I would be working out of the Electric Shop for the rest of my active duty; thus started my career as an Air Force Aircraft Electrician. At North American I was a Navy style Aircraft Electrician whose duty were quite different than those of an Air Force Electrician, as a Navy Aircraft Electrician I had to maintain any system that had a wire attached to it: Aircraft instrument Systems, Radio/Radar, Armament or any other system with a wire attached to it, the duties of the Air Force Aircraft Electrician were quite narrow in comparison: I maintained aircraft power generating systems, aircraft batteries, lighting, heating and air-conditioning and engine ignition system, etc . My first job as an Air Force Aircraft Electrician is another story.

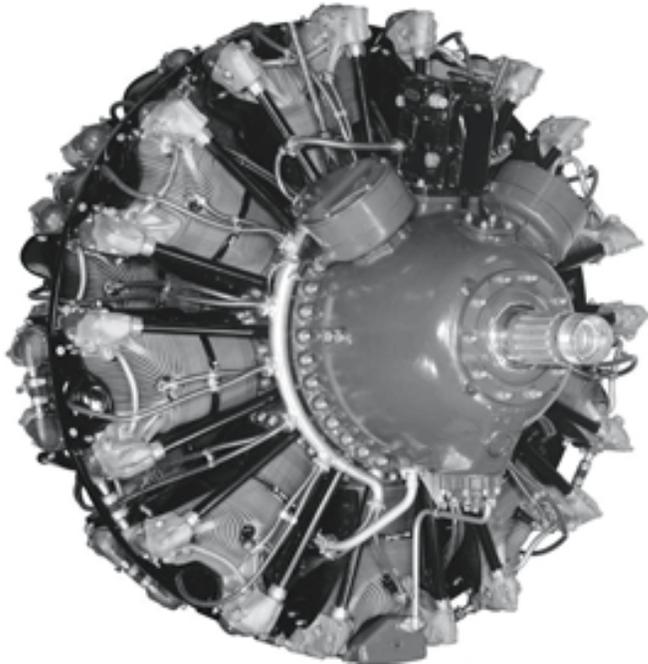
MY FIRST JOB AS AND AIR FORCE AIRCRAFT ELECTRICIAN

After I agreed to help in the Aircraft Electrical Shop I went to the Instrument Shop to get my things and let the Shop Chief know that I would no longer be sitting around doing nothing. He didn't speak to me, later one of his troop told me that the Field Maintenance Supervisor had chewed his ass out for his attitude about reservist and told him that he better change or else; it was months before he said a word to me and then only when he had to. Years later I had another run in with him, I'll cover that later. After informing him that I was leaving I went next door to the Electrical Shop there Sergeant Lester introduced me to his troops, there were no civilians working there, there were seven regular Air Force airmen assigned: one Buck Sergeant and all the rest PFC's. After the introduction and a tour of the shop and the Battery shop that was next door, her took me to the tool crib to get me issued an Aircraft Electrician Tool box. The civilian in the tool crib didn't want to issue me a toolbox because I was only going to be there for ten more days but the Lester insisted and threatened to go to the Engineering Officer (the Engineering Officer was the officer in charge of everything on the flight line, everyone answered to him; his equivalent today is the Chief of Maintenance). I got my toolbox and after lunch I went on my first job as an Air Force Aircraft Electrician; my first job required me to "time the magnetos" on a C46. I went out to the aircraft and the crew chief, Mr. Dick Gray, a civilian, met me as I approached. He challenged me because he had never seen me before; after I identified myself we got to work. To tell the truth I was somewhat apprehensive about timing the magnetos; the only time I had timed a magneto was when I was attending Aircraft and Engine school at Sheppard Air Force Base in 1949, six year before. I had to consult 1C-46-2 and -3 Technical Orders to find out what the degrees before top dead center the magneto were timed to. While I was reading I familiarized myself on magneto timing; the technical order contained all sorts of information on the systems installed in the aircraft, this is true on any aircraft. Once I was satisfied as to how to approach the job I got Dick Gray to turn the propeller while I watched

the top dead center indicator I had installed in the front spark plug hole of number one cylinder. Dick turned the prop to the position I wanted and I took the cover off the right magneto removed the points and condenser and installed new ones; I then adjusted the points to the just open position. I did the same with the left magneto and put the cowling back on and got Dick to run up the engine and check the magneto performance; to see if there was any RPM drop when the engine was operation on only the front or rear magneto. According to the Technical Order the drop was not to be more than 50 RPM when the magneto switch was placed from BOTH to LEFT or BOTH to RIGHT. The magnetos did not drop any RPM meaning the magnetos were adjusted perfectly. Dick wouldn't buy the zero RPM drop, he said that I had done something wrong and I told him "bull! I timed the magnetos perfectly that's why there was no RPM drop; he wouldn't buy it. I told him "OK, I'll retime the magneto only this time I'll set them off a little so that you can see an RPM drop. We went through the procedure once again only this time I had Dick on the stand with me watching what I was doing. We ran the engine again and recheck for magneto RPM drop and this time there was fifty RPM drop on both magnetos. Dick said, "If I hadn't seen it I wouldn't have believe it". He said, "Would you retime the magnetos again so there is no drop? I said "OK" and did so. Dick ran the engine up again and again there was no magneto RPM drop. He said, "I'll be dam". I asked if he wanted me to retime the magnetos so that there was a magneto RPM drop and he said "no, leave them like they are so I can show the other mechanics on the flight line the results of timing the magnetos perfectly. I signed of the aircraft maintenance forms and left. Later several guys came in to the shop looking for me wanting to meet the guy who could time magnetos perfectly; I wasn't there, I was out on the flight line working on an aircraft heater malfunction; the Shop Chief told me that they couldn't stop talking about it; I heard about it later from other mechanics on the flight line. I had built myself a reputation as a magneto-timing expert and all magneto timing work orders asked for me personally.



Curtis C46 Commando



The picture on the left is of the Pratt and Whitney Double Wasp R2800 engine that's installed on the C46 and the picture on the right is that of the General Electric Magneto that powers the spark plugs.

FLIGHT CHIEF AND CREW CHIEF

Not all the crew chiefs were impressed with my ability in magneto timing or my abilities as an Aircraft Electrician. I was handed a magneto timing work order and walked out to do the job and was met at the aircraft by the Staff Sergeant Crew Chief. He questioned me and found out that I was a reservist and he refused to let me work on the aircraft. He said "I don't want no f^%&ing know nothing reservist f*^ing up my aircraft". I told him "step aside, I was sent here to do a job and I'm going to do it. If you don't want to help I'll get someone who will". He stomped off and I got to work; first I went and asked Dick Gray, who was several aircraft down the line, if he would turn the prop for me and run up the aircraft and he said "OK, but where is the Crew Chief?" I told him what he had said and reluctantly Dick said, "OK, I'll help you". I was up on the engine stand and the Crew Chief came back with the Flight Chief. For those of you who don't know what a Flight Chief is, the flight line on any base is managed and supervised by the Line Chief and Flight Chiefs; the Line Chief is the overall boss and the Flight Chief, works for him and supervises a group of aircraft; at Clinton County Air Force Base at the time they supervised ten aircraft. Any way here come the Crew Chief and his boss the Flight Chief. They climb on the stand and the Flight Chief proceeds to jump all over me. He tells me that the Crew Chief doesn't think I'm qualified to do the job and to leave the aircraft. I told him that I would leave when I was done with the job and he grabbed me, we were on an engine stand eight feet off the ground, and told me that I would leave and leave right now! I said to him "Sergeant, he was a Master Sergeant; if you don't get your hands off me I'm going to deck you!" He let go of me and left. I finished the job and went back to the shop and was about to leave on another job when here come the Flight Chief and the Line Chief. The Flight Chief says "here he is" to the Line chief "he's the guy that wouldn't leave the aircraft when he was told to". I had met the Line Chief before, he came into the shop to meet the guy that could time magnetos

perfectly; at that time we talked and he found out that I was an Aircraft Electrician at North American Aviation. He looked at the Flight Chief and said to him “what makes you think he’s not qualified to work on aircraft?” and the Flight Chief said, “The Crew Chief told me so, besides he was insubordinate”. The Line Chief said to him “from what Dick Gray told me you grabbed him and he told you to let go of him or he’d deck you. He was not being subordinate, he was defending himself, as for the Crew Chief saying that he wasn’t qualified, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about; Sergeant Hamilton is one of the most qualified Aircraft Electrician here! You get the crew chief and report to me in my office!” The Line Chief looked at me and said, “carry on and good work” and left. In days to come neither the Flight Chief nor the Crew Chief would talk to me unless they had to; according to some of the personnel who were in the outer office of the Line Chief he chewed both their asses out real good and told them to change their attitudes about reservist.

MEETING THE ENGINEERING OFFICER

My reputation as an Aircraft Electrician finally reached the Engineering Officer, Captain Bryant; the officer in charge of everything on the flight line; the Engineering Officer had the same duties and responsibilities that the present day Chief of Maintenance have. I was called into his office and he asked me if I would consider hiring on as a civilian Aircraft Electrician after my fifteen day active duty tour was up, that he had heard I was a “cracker jack” electrician, he leveled all kinds of praises that had been passed on to him by some of the flight line individuals; he also told me that the Electric Shop supervisor, Technical Sergeant Lester, the Field Maintenance Superintendent and the Line Chief has recommended to him that I be approached on the subject; they didn’t want to lose me. I asked the Captain if I could go on active duty instead of hiring on as a civilian and he said “no, not at this time, accept civilian status and we’ll work on getting you on active duty”. I had been considering going back on active duty because things at North American were changing, the F86H line was coming to an end and there were rumors of lay-offs. I asked Captain Bryant if he would wait for my response until I talked to Helen and he said “OK, but don’t wait too long, I have to do some arm-twisting at Civilian Personnel”. I asked him how much the job would pay, that I wouldn’t even consider the job offer if it paid less than what I was getting at North American. Captain Bryant said, “How much are you getting at North American?” I told him and he said “hold on” picked up the phone and called someone at Civilian Personnel; he asked them what the hourly rate would be and they told him that it started at \$2.60 per hour, well above the \$1.65 I was getting at North American. I went back to the Electric Shop and Lester asked me how it went. I told him that Captain Bryant had offered me a civilian job. Lester said, “I know. I was the one that recommended to the Field Maintenance Superintendent to hire you. I’m getting out of the Air Force in several months and I would like for you to take over as Electric Shop Chief when I leave”. I asked Lester if I could go across the street to the NCO Club so I could call Helen and discuss the job offer with her. I called Helen at her mom’s house in Byesville and we discussed the job offer. I reminded Helen about the rumored layoffs at North American and the fact that the job offer started at well above what I was getting at North American; we finally decided that in the long run it would be in our best interest to accept the job. I went back to the shop and told Lester that I was going to talk to Captain Bryant and Lester said, “What did you decide?” I told him I was going to accept the job. I went to Captain Bryant’s office and asked the Line Chief if I could talk to Captain Bryant and he asked me if I was going to accept the job and I said “Yes”. I went in the Captain’s office and told him “OK I’ll take the job”. He told me to go to Civilian Personnel and get the ball rolling.

At Civilian Personnel I signed many forms and informed them that I would have to give North American two weeks' notice before I could start, they said fine, the job is yours, be back then and start to work. What I didn't know then was that the job was a temporary one that had been created at the insistence of Captain Bryant until it could be converted to a permanent one; this happened when the Air Reserve Technician (ART) program came into being. Understand the job was a pure civilian one, it didn't require me to belong to the Air Force Reserve. After I started work at Clinton County Air Force Base I had my reserve unit affiliation transferred to the 302nd TCW. I made many friends in the two weeks I was at the base for my active duty tour. Many came to the shop to say goodbye when my tour was about up not knowing that I would be back as a civilian. I was released on a Friday and I drove to Byesville to pick up Helen and Vikki. I visit with her folks and mine for a day and drove home to Columbus on Sunday and on Monday I went to work and told the Forman that I was quitting because I was offered a good job at Clinton County Air Force Base and he told me "I'm glad you got another job because I got word the we will be laying off some of the personnel in this department and one of those was to be you". The Forman send me to personnel to get the ball rolling and there I officially gave my two weeks' notice. In two weeks Helen, Vikki and I were on our way to Wilmington and Mrs. Timmons Trailer Court; oh yes, before I left Wilmington I went looking for a trailer court to park our house trailer on and found that there was only one in Wilmington: Mrs. Timmons' Trailer Park where I rented a trailer space.