

## History for Jim Richmond

Having come to the Academy from Texas, I was excited to be going back to Texas for pilot training after graduation in June. Although I wouldn't start pilot training until September, I didn't waste any time after graduation heading back to my home state. Pilot training at Laredo was an exciting time. Graduating #2 in my class, I had my choice of assignments, and took a C-135 MAC assignment at McGuire. That was frustrating to my instructors who knew I could have pretty much anything I wanted, but I wanted to both see the world and hone my piloting skills, so this looked like the best option for me. Although we all knew of the conflict raging in Vietnam, at the time we newly minted pilots seemed to give little thought to Vietnam when making our assignment selections, but we would soon find ourselves there – at least most of us would be there in one capacity or another. My first trip after getting checked out in the C-135 was to Germany, but I saw very little of Europe after that first trip because most trips in my airlift squadron were soon headed west to Vietnam. I stayed at McGuire for 3½ years as a transport pilot, but that was enough of that life, and I never looked back.

During my time as a transport pilot, I kept my eye on the time that I would be going to Southeast Asia in a combat tour. That time came in early 1969, and I immediately went to the personnel office to make my request for what I wanted to fly there because I had learned that those who made specific requests were more likely to get something they wanted. I wanted a real combat tour, and I got an OV-10 FAC assignment. That assignment eventually took me to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air force Base in Northeastern Thailand to fly missions over the Ho Chi Minh trail. During that year I was the Flight Commander for the Prairie Fire mission and lead FAC for “out country” search and rescue (SAR). Prairie Fire was a highly classified mission to infiltrate Special Forces teams behind enemy lines that required FACS to find landing zones (LZs), lead helicopters into the LZs and provide top cover and assistance in exfiltration. I never really kept precise track of my combat missions, but it was over 200 missions in the OV-10 and another 35+ mission as a transport pilot. The time as a FAC was exciting and led to my next assignment – an assignment that was on my dream list because I was selected to attend the Aerospace Research Pilot School (which later became the Air Force Test Pilot School). That training focused the rest of my career and also directed my paths following retirement from the Air Force.

After Test Pilot School, I spent 10 years at Wright Patterson AFB, first as a squadron test pilot, then on to AFIT, next an assignment in a Systems Program Office and then back to the Test Wing to be a Squadron Commander. When I had to leave Wright Patterson, I was given great flexibility and eventually requested an assignment as an Air Attaché when nothing else looked challenging. My assignment was to Rangoon, Burma. This was another exciting posting at an interesting time in Burma's history. Attaché's were seldom promoted, and I was no exception. Although disappointed, my last assignment in the Air force was a pivotal assignment for me. I was asked to go to Edwards AFB as the Director of Operations and Programs – a flying assignment! Although I only spent one year in that assignment, it paved my way into retirement. Getting to fly a wide range of airplanes didn't hurt, either.



Although I thoroughly enjoyed my last assignment, it was time to pull the plug and start my second career, so I retired from the Air Force in June 1986. I didn't have any specific plans for a second career and thought finding that next career would be easier than it was. I was unemployed with numerous résumés for various positions but didn't have a flood of calls for interviews and there were no offers of employment! However, at the time, the Voyager project to fly unrefueled around the world was in full swing, and Voyager asked me to help plan the unrefueled "Around the World" flight. So I did have something to do, even if it was only volunteer work. I soon learned that the flight around the world had only been planned conceptually and that I would be planning the entire flight, starting with nothing more than rudimentary flight test data! Before the flight actually occurred, I was hired by Teledyne Ryan in San Diego and was taken away from the day to day changes that were necessary as the world flight struggled with delays. However, I stayed in close contact with the Voyager project and updated the flight plan each night. I also stayed in contact as the Voyager made its way around the world and was present for the landing back at Mojave.

My job with Teledyne Ryan was interesting because I was hired to develop the remote cockpit for a new generation of remotely piloted vehicles; however, I didn't like having a desk job with no clear way up. I had heard that most military retirees did not hold their first post retirement jobs for long, and I was no exception. Although the job was interesting, I never really clicked with Teledyne Ryan and left there in February 1987. I wanted to fly again! I had spoken to the FAA about a test pilot job before retiring from the Air Force and immediately renewed that focus. The FAA was slow in hiring me, but finally brought me aboard in August 1987.

With the FAA, I have had another interesting and rewarding career. As an FAA test pilot, I have flown on several test programs, have gotten two world speed records, and have had the opportunity to be on interesting assignments. This included the Russian certification program for the Ilyushin 96T, where we provided guidance to the nascent Russian certification authority. Even before that work was concluded, I was selected to become the Chief Technical Advisor for an International Civil Aviation organization (ICAO) program in Indonesia. That assignment was for 4 years in Jakarta. Returning to the Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office, I became the Manager of Flight Test and then moved up to Manager of the Certification Office. Never able to stay too comfortable in a good job, I volunteered to take the first FAA Manager of the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Assistance Team posting. Another exciting assignment! And to cap that off, the FAA returned me to another flying assignment as the Manager of the Aircraft Certification Service Flight Program, and that is where I am as I write this in 2011. Well almost. The FAA has also asked me to manage the Rotorcraft Certification Office while a permanent manager is selected. I have learned more about helicopters than I ever expected and I even go out to fly one now and then.



In San Antonio during the summer before pilot training, I met a young lady and was engaged to be married before pilot training even commenced. We were married just before Christmas 1964. We had one daughter born in 1966. That marriage, however, didn't last. Once again as a bachelor living in New Jersey and flying out of McGuire AFB, I was captivated by the beauty of the girl across the street from

where I lived in Mount Holly. Patricia and I were married while I was in the “pipeline” for Southeast Asia in 1969. We have two daughters and as many military couples, have lived all across our United States as well as in Burma and Indonesia. We currently live in Fort Worth, Texas, but we still wonder where the future will take us.

I can say that the Air Force Academy prepared me for an exciting career that didn’t stop at retiring from the Air Force and has been an integral part of my life.