

HOW I BECAME AN AG  
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(A FEW SEA STORIES INCLUDED)

A little background to start. I was born in 1938 and during my formable years, like millions of other boys in this time period, our heroes were men of World War II. Mine were three of my uncles, two were in the navy and one in the 101st Airborne. Both navy uncles served in the Pacific, and the other in Europe. My uncle Paul was among the men that parachuted into France on "D" Day. He was killed at Bastogne, Belgian, during the BATTLE OF THE BAULDGE. My oldest uncle Bill was a radioman, and had two ships blown out from under him. He got home in 1945. Uncle Bill was recalled during the Koran War. He stayed for 20+ years and retired as a Chief CT. My uncle Jimmy had a ship blown out from under him also. He also got home in 1945. He would never talk about his navy time.

My teen years were good, I ran with six other guys. The six of us hung out almost every day after school. Three of us joined the navy, one in the air force and one to the army. The sixth could not join any service due to a medical condition. My best friend Al and I were inseparable, where he was I was and vice versa. Al and I decided to join the navy one day at lunch in high school. We talked to our parents and they said OK. So, in June 1956 we joined the navy reserves. We went to boot camp that summer in Bembridge, MD. My first real look at the navy.

The summer between eleventh and twelfth grade Al and I once again went our separate ways. I can't remember where Al went for his two weeks active but I went to sea onboard the USS Amhurst PC 853, out of Philadelphia. I was a seamen apprentice Boatswain's Mate (BM). There was this WW II Chief Boatswain's Mate (BM) that ran gunner practice. He pulled me aside one day and said to get out of the rating because it was dying. But Chief, "I want to be a BM." He said "you are going to be a high school graduate and should not be a BM." What should I do? "Become one of those brown shoe sailors."

Upon graduation from high school Al went active, regular navy. He went to big boot camp and I went to work at HJ Heinz and started a family. Al came home after boot camp and said he was going to a place called Norman, OK for classification. After Norman and he told me he was heading for a place called Lakehurst, NJ to become an Aerographer's Mate. "What the hell is an Aerographer's Mate?" He told me it dealt with weather. My response was who cares about the weather. After Al left, I got to thinking that I wanted to go active and talked is over with Mary Ann. She was not really ok with it but if that is what I wanted she would go along. By the way at this time we had our first son. I tried to go active and could not pass the physical due to a punctured ear drum, back to HJ. Continued with my weekly reserve meeting.

The fall of 1959 my reserve command moved to a new location in Pittsburgh and sent all reserves who had not complete their two years active to active duty. The day after Thanksgiving 1958, in a major snow storm, I was off to Philadelphia for classification. While there I remembered what the Chief BM told me, "Get out of this rating". I requested a classification as Airman Apprentice. It was approved. Received orders to VP-56, flying boats, Norfolk, VA.

Reported to VP-56 at NAS Norfolk. Now at this point I needed to figure out what path I would take. Talked to the Chief about becoming an Aviation Mechanic Mate. He approved. That did not last long, getting grease under my finger nails did not sit well with me. So, I talked to the Chief again and he was

not happy with me at this point and ask me what did I think would make me happy. I said "maybe an Air controlman." The Chief said "you reservist piss me off." We need to fill a position at special services (SS) and you will be going there Monday. Off to SS where I was mowing lawns and selling tickets for the movie theater. Special Services was cool. You had football teams, basketball teams, boxing teams and swimming teams. I played softball for Airlant and became good friends with the boxing team.

After a few months in SS I was notified that they needed a lifeguard for the swimming pools. Whoever took the job would need to take Water Safety Instructions in the evening with the Red Cross in downtown Norfolk. That was up my ally and I volunteered. For the next 14 months I was a lifeguard. Instructed water safety to pilots and air crew members at the indoor pool showing them how to exit a downed plane with the dilbert dunker.

Now all this time my pal AL was doing his thing as an Aerographer's Mate. We would correspond now and then and he kept telling me I should become one, Aerographer. Not me.

I met a basketball player who was a AG3 by the name of Higgins. We would talk now and then about the rating. He was attached to Fleet Weather Norfolk and TAD during basketball season. One day he was going over to FW and said "come along to see what we do", and I did. Now we are getting to the good part. While at FW I seen these AGs sending msgs using morse code via speed keys. I said to myself that looks neat man, and I would like to do that; mind you it was not the WX that got my attention but the morse code sending msgs to other AGs.

Well after three tries I passed the test and became an Airman, still striking for nothing. My two years active duty is rapidly coming to an end. What to do, go back home with HJ or stay in the navy. I truly felt I could do well in the navy so I told Mary Ann what I had in mind. She told me she did not want to live this poor and if I was going to stay in the navy I would have to do better. She asks, "what would I do in the navy" and I said "I would like to try and become an AG." She said she would go along with it but I had to do better.

I reenlisted in the regular Navy for seven years under the Star Program and it was off to Lakehurst, NJ. That is how I became an Aerographer's Mate.