

The following is a communication sent in to this Webmaster from
Raymond Lawrence Smith, Ph.D.
LTC (retired) US Army

Thank you so very much for sending me the email with the pictures. When I received them I stopped everything and blew up each picture trying to recognize some of the fellows from Fort Sill. The only person I almost recognizes was Captain Hibbs, but he was in a photograph with two other men, so I can't say for sure that I picked him out.

The big thrill was the comment under the title, "Back to Photo Gallery" about my airplane, Army 223. I arrived at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, straight out of Fort Sill's Army Aviation School, in November of 1953. The eighteen pilots in the "Signal School Support Section", at Fort Monmouth, claimed that 223 was a dog. No one wanted to fly it, so every day, as the youngest pilot in the section, and the only Black pilot in a section, in which the section chief told me publicly that he didn't want a Black pilot. I flew 223. It was an L-19A back then. For five years, I flew Army 223 just to stay out of the Section Chief's sight. I learned to love that airplane. In fact, that was the airplane that on my very first mission at Fort Monmouth, I had to pick it up at Wright Patterson Air Force Base and ferry it back to Fort Monmouth. I had to fly Army 223 through snow storms, sleet, hail, and heavy rain during the Thanksgiving weekend of 53, and it took me five days to make the trip. That was my introduction to Army 223. Of more importance, I was broke.

I was comfortable as the Signal Operation Officer for the Fifth Corps in Germany, when I got orders for Vietnam. The good ole Army sent me to Nebraska in the bootstraps program to get a degree before proceeding to Vietnam. After Nebraska, I wound up at Fort Sill as one of the officers in the 184th. We didn't have a first Sergeant, The men were recent graduates of Fort Eustis maintenance course. We made an E-5, who was a propeller specialist our First Sergeant. The major who was the original commander pulled out of going to Vietnam. I was left as the senior major. They made me the company commander. I had to send young pilots who were recent graduates of Fort Rucker, from Fort Sill to Wichita, Kansas to pick up our airplanes.

That is when I saw Army 223 again. I flew Army 223 during the training. I think that was the airplane I flew to California to be placed on the ship. Our airplanes arrived in country before the men, and I had the wings put on Army 223 first. That is the airplane I flew, in country, for the few weeks I was with the 184th. I picked up my first rifle hit in Army 223 in a little town west of Siagon.

I recognized Captain Forrest Faulkner's name, but I didn't see his photograph. He was with the advance party. He was a valuable member of the advanced team, but he too had to frown at the rice paddy they put us in at Phu Loi.

So my fellow aviators, if ever Army 223 flies by, I shall "Stand and Salute."

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