

CHAPTER VII - AIRMAN SCHOOL

Airman School was only an eight week course but took longer because of the Christmas holiday shut down. All the students were encouraged to request leave and spend the holidays at home with their families. Those students not requesting leave would spend the holidays as members of a working party. Me and most of the other students requested leave. I spent my leave time enjoying the holidays with my parents.

School resumed on January 7, 1952 and our class graduated on January 18, 1953. Much of this time was spent on screening to determine which "A" School we would be sent to next. The Navy called the basic entry level schools for various occupational skills, "A" School. These "A" Schools were normally about 16 weeks in duration. The advanced schools for these occupational skills were called "B" Schools and were usually six months in duration.

I informed my interviewer that I had been sent to Airman School as a prerequisite for Photographers "A" School or Aerial Photographers School. He informed me that the Navy had temporarily discontinued the Photographers School and the Aerial Photographers School because the Navy was over quota in these fields. I told him that since both my first and my second choice were unavailable, that I should be sent to sea and allowed to strike for Boatswains Mate. My interviewer said that allowing me to strike for boatswains Mate was impossible because as a graduate of Airman's School, it was mandatory that I be sent on to one of the Class "A" Schools in the field of Aviation. He showed me a list of Aviation Schools and asked me to pick one. The first one on his list was AD School (Aviation Mechanic). I could see myself working on an aircraft engine but the mere thought of getting behind the throttle of an airplane and revving up the engine scared the hell out of me. The next one I looked at was PR School (Parachute Rigger). The thought of packing parachutes didn't excite as much as the thrill of jumping out of an airplane. It is a long standing tradition that a Parachute Rigger had to be willing to jump out of an airplane with any chute that he had packed. Because of this tradition, jump training was part of the Parachute Riggers School curriculum. My interviewer told me that I couldn't go to PR school because I was too tall. He said that there is a height limit because tall people have a history of suffering serious back injury from jumping out of airplanes. The next two schools I asked about were unavailable because their quotas had already been filled with classmates with higher academic standings than mine. At this point, I was both angry and frustrated. I was angry because I felt I had been tricked out of becoming a Boatswains Mate and forced into Naval Aviation and frustrated because anything I found even remotely interesting was unavailable. I asked the interviewer what other choices were left on his list. The first school he mentioned was the AM (Aviation Structural Mechanic) School at Memphis. I was so frustrated at this point that I interrupted him and said, "I'll take it." I was granted AM School as the first choice of all the schools that I didn't want.