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Period 2

Wendell Ashley  
United States Air Force  
1953 - 1983  
Interviewed: 2018



### Wendell Ashley

In 1955, an architect graduate, Wendell Ashley, was called into the United States Air Force. As a little kid, he was always interested in the Marines and had a lot of connections with a new Air Base in Tuskegee, Alabama. When he received a letter from the President that he was called to serve in the Air Force, he was excited, but at the same time was worried about where he would go. Ashley entered the Air Force as an Officer and was first stationed at an Air Base in Alabama that, at the time, held 3700 people. It wouldn't be too long until he was called into the General's office and given his first job.

He was given his first assignment to redesign the front entrance of the base. With much enthusiasm, he accepted and completed the job. At this time, Ashley was only in his twenties and his career was already beginning to escalate. Before he joined, he had already worked for another architectural firm. But little did he know that being a base architect and design engineer in the Air Force would take him all over the world. Leading him to small towns and great countries. This also allowed him to gain new job titles and experience culture everywhere he traveled.

Ashley was stationed in American hometown's like Rome, New York in 1957, Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico in 1964, Dayton, Ohio in 1970 and Pensacola, Florida in 1971. He realized how much knowledge you can gain through traveling with the Air Force. Ashley wanted to travel and see things, and the Air Force gave him that, and more. This became even more true with his third assignment in 1960 when he was stationed in Tachikawa, Japan as the Chief Plans

and Programs and Chief construction Inspection. In Japan, new experiences were gained, not just with the Air Force, but learning the Japanese culture. Such as, the coffee was very expensive, on account of it not being as popular as the tea in Japan. He states that, “you can’t take America with you everywhere,” meaning that wherever you go you have to be willing to adapt and learn the culture of where you are.

In 1967, Ashley was assigned to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska as Deputy Base Civil Engineer for off-base facilities. Alaska became his and his family’s home for about four years. The position put him in charge of the maintenance, repair, and construction of real property facilities and systems at the 28 Air Force Remote Station throughout Alaska. The unit faced many problems with Alaska’s winters being incredibly cold, causing problems throughout the camps. It was important to always follow the rules, especially wearing their gloves always, or their hands may get stuck to something. At sites with upper and lower camps, the cables that drove cable trolleys (their primary source for transportation) would at times freeze up, leaving them stuck in their current location. This was a challenge of living in these conditions but the natural beauties of Alaska and the happiness his family and him had outweighed the difficulties.

During his 30 years in the Air Force, he has received numerous awards and medals. One of them being the Air Force Commendation Medal with the four oak-leaf clusters; each cluster representing how many times he has been awarded that medal. He also received a Joint Service Commendation Medal through the Army and Air Force for his outstanding service to the United States. The Air Force gained him many friends and a new found understanding of the world. He has accomplished between two to three hundred temporary and about nineteen permanent change of stations. Locations around the world he’s been to include, twenty-eight remote Air Force sites

throughout Alaska, over fifty-two Army and Air Force Sites throughout Europe, and multiple Air Force Sites in the Philippines, Japan, and Thailand.

In 1983, Ashley retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. He considers the Air Force as a, “1000% positive experience.” He states that, “retirement felt great, but on the other hand the transition was tough because I wasn’t sure about what I wanted to do.” One thing he got from his service is that, “people can achieve whatever they want to, as long as you believe in yourself.” In the beginning, he wasn’t expecting to be where he was when he retired. He wasn’t expecting to go to all the places he went to. He wasn’t expecting to be given such a huge responsibility as his first job at such a young age. Everything that happened in 30 years was because of one decision. To join the United States Air Force. And to this day, he lives to say, “I was just lucky as to have had such a wonderful experience.”