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Period 2

James E. Williams Jr.  
Air Force  
1960- 1984  
2018

### James E. Williams Jr.

The Vietnam War is a large part of America's identity and history. After joining the Air Force just as he finished college James E Williams Jr. served in over 47 countries and islands including Vietnam. Subsequently, joining the Air Force Williams Jr. became an expert navigator and dedicated a significant part of his life fighting to defend the freedom of America. Almost spending an entire 24 years in the Air Force a young man raised in a small town persevered and came from the ground up to become a professional navigator.

Williams Jr. was born in Kansas City, Missouri and raised in the state of Kansas in a small town by the name of Waverly. Williams Jr attended grades one through twelve at his local public schools. Prior to joining the Air Force Williams Jr went straight in to college attending Kansas University. After college the draft board went straight after him, already having his Army physical and pilots license Williams Jr. was ready to be drafted. On November 10th, 1960 he officially joined the Air Force and began his first training days.

First stationed in Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, Williams spent a year in initial officer training school (1960). These first few weeks were especially hard for him because it would be the first time he'd have been away from his wife and family for a long time. Still, he decided to keep going and he attended many other training schools all across America from Sacramento, CA for Bombardier School to Walton Beach, FL for Gunship School. He even attended Jungle Survival School at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines in 1971 where the

instructor would pay the natives in food to hunt down the students in order to test their savvy. He was a very elite student and describes his work as “more of an art than a job.”

Williams' Navigator joy started early after his training. His first combat mission was to fly in cargo to Vietnam in 1963, and the second objective was to go on his first tour in a C141-A. Carrying on through his experienced years, he flew as a navigator out of an Airbase in Thailand on a gunship which alone let him acquire 750 hours of over 155 combat missions. But there were hardly any dull moments, as the crew he was a part of was more of a close community rather than just coworkers. This shows through the pranks that were pulled, including tracing pencil on the radar machine so that whenever Williams would use the machine it would leave him with some paint-on glasses. Aside from the fun memories, there were times in which they'd be under tracer, so they'd have “only about five or six seconds to react and maneuver to avoid getting hit”, he made clear that the matter was crucial to survival and that while there was normally time for fun, they'd have to be very flexible in their mentalities in order to survive. Combat was stressful and often the resort to leisurely activities like racquetball and swimming as well as drinking alcohol would soothe their nerves. After twenty-three years of intense combat, Williams finished his service in the United States Air Force on August 31st, 1984.

The day of retirement from the U. S. Air Force was a “memorable” one, on August 30th, 1984, Williams Jr marched out with four of his peers and read off his retirement citation and the list of medals he earned in front of an intimate selection of friends and family's. After 23 years he was awarded with the Distinguished Flying Cross Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, 17 Air Medals (fifteen for gunship action and two for cargo missions), commendation medal with on leaf cluster and about nine other medals. Following his time in service Williams Jr. got a job with Northrop Grumman as a flight test engineer. He stayed at Edwards AFB California for nine

and half years. Then got hired by Hughes doing technical service work for another two years subsequently completely retiring.

James E. Williams Jr. has sacrificed so much in terms of freedom and safety in his line of service, of which he views as him making a positive contribution of fulfilling his role in the United States military. And even though he doesn't regret joining the service, he wishes he could've spent more time with his wife and family during those years. Now, with his contribution to the country finished, he tries to keep in touch with his memorable crewmates every once in a while and attends reunions across the country when he can in order to remember and relive his experience as an American veteran.