

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AN OFFICER'S CAREER



MAJOR WILLIAM A. WHITMIRE, JR.
1967 - 1987

Veteran's Name: William A. Whitmire, Jr.
Retiring Rank: Major
Years Served: 1967-1987
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ROTC

Retired Major William A. Whitmire, Jr.'s military career in the United States Air Force began in ROTC (Reserve Officer's Training Corps). First in the Junior ROTC program in high school at the age of 15 in 1957, and then in the college ROTC program at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

He first joined the ROTC program in high school, because he liked studying military science, wearing the military uniform, and because "the girls liked guys in uniform." In addition, it was his way of becoming oriented and learning about the military.

When he entered Howard University at the age of 17, he joined the Air Force ROTC program. ROTC was basically a program that prepared college graduates to enter the military as officers.

He grew up during a time, in the 1960's, when "young men were being drafted" to serve in the Vietnam War. He said, "If I were going to go into the military, I wanted to go as an officer...rather than waiting for the military to draft me as an enlisted person." At the time, he was an electrical engineering student in the School of Engineering and Architecture, and it was quite common for

engineering or science students to get what was called a Class II Deferment so he doubted he would have gone as an enlisted person. However, if he had been a high school graduate, his chances of being drafted greatly increased. In his words, "I would have been a prime bullet catcher."

The second reason, he chose to go into ROTC was because around the age of ten he became intrigued by flying and wanted to become a pilot. Joining the military was a way of getting into a pilot program. His passion for flying also played an important role in him choosing to become an electrical engineer. When he was thinking about what he needed to do to become a pilot, he saw a lot of pilots who were engineers and thought that would be his route to becoming a pilot. He also took an electronics course in high school and liked it. He made large, crude radios that were about 2' x 3' in size.

From 1959 to 1964, he attended Howard University and was an active member of the ROTC program the first four years of his college career. He received four years of training in military science and attended a three-week summer camp during his junior and senior year of college. Together this training prepared him to become an officer in the United States Air Force.



ROTC Summer Camp attendees in 1962.

Retired Major William A. Whitmire, Jr. did not attend boot camp. The closest thing he came to boot camp was his attendance at ROTC Summer Camp in 1962 at Lockbourne Air Force Base (AFB) in Columbus, Ohio. He said, “We went through survival school, and we got a chance to fly, and we learned more about the military.” They also had briefings and activities all day dealing with a number of subjects. It was not like a traditional boot camp. For example, they exercised for approximately an hour a day and ran to most places. They rarely walked. Although physical conditioning was an integral part of the program, they did not have to pass any physical tests to successfully complete the training. The same went for guns. They had to learn how to shoot 45’s, but again they did not have to meet a certain proficiency. In fact, the only time Retired Major Whitmire carried a gun was during Junior ROTC in high school; he carried an unloaded 16 pound, M-16 while marching.



Flying plane during ROTC Summer Camp in 1962 in Columbus, OH.

Probably the most challenging aspect of ROTC Summer Camp was completing a three-day survival school. For three days and two nights, they, the cadets, became POW’s who were placed in enemy territory and had to find their way to base camp. All they were given were a compass and a map. They were placed in the back of this truck and put off in the woods, in this pitch, black woods at about 8 or 9 o’clock at night. “We were

taken into the back country..., and there were no paths in the woods and told to hop out.” “You’re on your way.” According to Retired Major Whitmire, they “were supposed to spread out and not all get captured at one time, but my group must have been ‘chicken’...probably chicken like other groups. We all stayed close together.”

The next day at about 10 o’clock in the morning, they showed up at their rendezvous point, and of course, when they got there the enemy was waiting for them and captured all of them and took them back to the POW camp. They had to do push-ups in a sulfur pond that had goat heads in it, and they did not know it. “Every once in a while a goat head would float by and scare...you.” “Plus the pond was sulfur, and sulfur stinks like ‘rotten eggs...’” “So it was rotten,” he said, and “on top of that we...were going to be out there two more (days).”

Then they had these tents we were supposed to sleep in. He said, “We never saw the inside of those tents.” They also had a variety of chores for them to do like cleaning up camp, moving rocks, and killing goats. Then “they taught us survival techniques...told us all the things we did wrong.” They taught them some survival techniques before POW camp, but they wanted to see how they would do on their own first.

During college, he received a \$90 quarterly stipend from the ROTC program; however that was “pocket money,” and he did not use it to pay for his education. He lived at home with his parents and paid for his education by working as a caddie during the summers and holidays. He worked at the Army Navy Country Club for three years starting at age 15 and then worked at the Chevy Chase Country Club for a couple of years. Then he was selected to work at Harry Diamond Laboratory in the Electronic Countermeasures Division as a White House Student Trainee (government intern) during his last two summers in college.

He worked as a research electronic engineer, and his job was to develop Doppler fuses. “These were what were called proximity or variable time fuses.” They are devices put on bombs, rockets, or mortars and could detonate a munition during a close encounter with an air target or at some distance above the ground. “No longer would an anti-aircraft gunner expend countless rounds trying to hit a moving aircraft, and no longer could an enemy wait out an artillery barrage safely in a trench or fox hole.”

After the summer of his junior year in college, they did not let him fly. “The wash out rate for pilot school was 90 something percent. In my class, there were two people who got to go to pilot



First assignment in the Air Force. Los Angeles Air Force Station in Los Angeles, CA in 1968.

school out of about 30 people.” His choice to go into the Air Force rather than another branch of the military, proved to be a wise one. “I picked the Air Force, because I wanted to be a pilot initially, and I thought the Air Force would offer me more opportunities if I didn’t become a pilot, and I never liked...carrying a rifle...”

The Vietnam War (1964-1975)

During the Vietnam War, Retired Major Whitmire served as both a civilian and military officer. From 1964 to 1967, he worked at Harry Diamond Laboratory, and from 1967 to 1975, he worked at two Air Force offices in Southern California.

While working at Harry Diamond Laboratory, he pursued his master of engineering administration degree. When he graduated from Howard University in 1964 with a B.S.E.E., bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering, he received a commission for the United States Air Force, because he had completed the ROTC program. However, the military allowed him to delay reporting for active duty immediately, because they thought the masters would be of use to him and of some value to them. “There was a great need for engineers so they would agree to almost anything.” The second reason that he did not want to go into the military right after he graduated from Howard University was because there was a need for electrical engineers to work with missiles, in particular Minuteman missiles. He did not want to go out to Wyoming or South Dakota or North Dakota and go live in one of those silos, “rat holes,” deep below ground.

On September 15, 1967, he reported to Los Angeles Air Force Station for active duty and all he did was check in with his office and let them know that he was in town and would be coming to work. He was told “why don’t you go home... look for a place. When you get settled in...come on back in.” “My boss said, ‘keep me informed of where you are, and when you get settled in, come to work.’” That was what he did.

When he reported to his job, he reported to a huge conglomerate of office buildings. It was about six, large, three-story buildings with approximately 1,500 officers, Air Force officers. It was primarily where the nation's military space programs were housed. "I was really flabbergasted at the size of it, and the elaborateness of it. Out in front of the main building was a Titan 3C missile, which stood over three stories high, and it was very...impressive. ...For me, it was like reporting to a civilian office building. As a matter of fact, if you passed it on the street, you would not have known that it was a military base or facility (except for the missile out front)." In addition, the majority of people who worked there were civilians.

The civilians provided general systems engineering and corporate knowledge for the Air Force. They were the "technical experts." All of the officers had some type of engineering background. However, the civilians "were experts in specific areas..., and quite frankly they were more knowledgeable than their military counterparts." The civilians worked for companies like "Aerospace Corporation"(on and off-site) or "Mitre (off-site in MA)." "They worked 'hand and glove' with the military officers who would come and spend maybe three, four, or five years in a particular job and move on; whereas the Aerospace and Mitre engineers

would stay in their positions or current jobs for 10, 15 years."

The first project that he worked on was in the Communications Satellite System Program Office. He worked as an advancer planner for communication satellites. One of the current programs was the Initial Defense Communication Satellite Program (IDCSP). This program consisted of 26 small, simple satellites. These satellites had no batteries and no active attitude. They provided general military communications. The program was secret and required a secret clearance to have access to it.

This was more or less an experimental satellite system. At the same time these satellites were launched, a more sophisticated system, the Defense Satellite Communication System Phase II was being worked on. It was a larger satellite and had increased communications capacity, had greater transmission strength, and...a longer lifetime. The longer lifetime was like five years whereas the lifetime of the small IDCSP satellite system was like 18 months. "The Defense Satellite Communication System satellites covered a wider area than the small satellites, and it only took four of those in synchronous orbit to provide worldwide coverage with no outages. Whereas with the small satellites, there were periods of time where you could not communicate

through the satellites.” These satellites were designed to carry secret data, secret voice, and encrypted messages. For example, secret battle plans could be transmitted via the satellites.

As an advanced planner, he interfaced with the Air Force laboratories like the propulsion laboratory and the avionics laboratory. He interfaced with Aerospace Corporation and the Mitre Corporation. Both did all kinds of feasibility studies and studies for the advanced development of communication and non-communication satellite systems such as the global positioning satellite. He also interfaced with NASA Ames Research Center, NASA’s propulsion center, NASA/Goodard Space Flight Center as well as nuclear agencies, the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California, and the Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico.

Besides the IDCSP, he had to be knowledgeable about other programs within his office as well. For example, the Defense Nuclear Surveillance Program. They called that program the “Vela Program,” and it was launched to monitor the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed in 1963. It was launched to make sure that Russia complied with the treaty. We also wanted to know if they were launching a nuclear attack, and when and if they were doing any nuclear testing.

He also did some further planning for what is called the Air Force Satellite Communication System, the AFSATCOM System. “It was a system of four satellites in geo-synchronous orbit that was used by the SIOP Forces, Single Integrated Operational Forces. Those are nuclear capable forces, and they were very survivable. For example, in the case of a nuclear attack, they could withstand a nuclear attack from radiation and things such as an EMP, electromagnetic pulse.

His job was to identify requirements for new technology and to advocate and promote technology for new systems that were coming down the pike. He worked with a number of civilian companies that had ideas for new technology that they wanted to incorporate into their (the Air Force’s) advanced satellite systems.

Furthermore, he had to be knowledgeable about other programs in his office, because he prepared many briefings and presentations for his program director. The program director in turn briefed Generals in Washington and the Generals at Space Division.

He held this job from 1967 to 1972. When asked about what his first few days in the Air Force felt like, he had this to say. “I really felt like I had an important job. I felt like I was doing something

that only a few people got an opportunity to do. I also felt like I was on the cutting-edge of technology, and I was dealing with some of the smartest people in the country...engineers and also high level people at the Pentagon. I communicated directly with the Deputy Director of Research and Engineering, which was a big job at the Department of Defense (DOD). The Deputy Director communicated directly with congressional staffers and occasionally...he would come to me and get my input as to what kind of satellites were possible in the next generation, how much would they cost, and this would go into the DOD budget which would in turn go into the President's budget. It was very interesting to see that what came out of my office went into the national budget."

From February 1973 to August of 1975, he worked at Northrop Corporation in Hawthorne, California. While at Northrop, he worked on the F-5E International Fighter Aircraft. It was a lightweight tactical fighter that was used as an aggressor airplane to simulate Russia's Mig 21 and 23. It was also used as the basis, technological base, for the new generation of trainers, the T-38. It also provided the basic technology for the F-16, which is in today's inventory. It delivers bombs as well as can engage in dogfights, aerial fights between airplanes.

His first job at Northrop Corporation was as a quality engineer, and his job was to make sure that Northrop complied with all the quality requirements of their quality assurance program. He also made sure that they built the airplane in accordance with what the contract said they could build it with and also that they complied with good manufacturing practices.

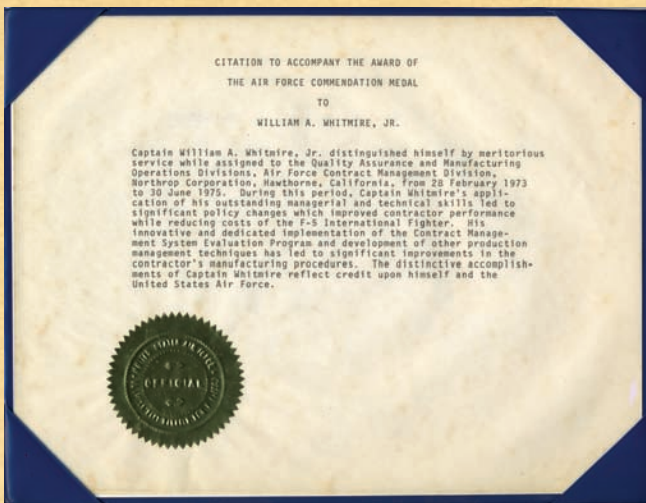
If they wished to deviate from their contracted or good practices, they would have to get the Air Force's concurrence or agreement. "My job was to come down to the line where they were building airplanes and review the changes, manufacturing changes or build around they planned and to sign off on it. If I didn't sign off on it, they could not implement the build change."



F-5E International Fighter Jet produced at Northrop in Hawthorne, CA.



Captain William A. Whitmire, Jr. was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal in June 1975.



The citation for the Air Force Commendation Medal awarded in 1975.

The second year he worked at Northrop, he worked in Manufacturing Operations. His title was manufacturing engineer. His job was to make sure that the F-5E was built or manufactured the way that the contractor said he would build the airplane. “If there were any deviations, it had to be approved by the Air Force, and he was one of the Air Force representatives who had to approve any changes.

His third job at Northrop from 1974 to 1975 was to ensure that Northrop was complying with the Air Force cost schedule reporting requirements. “In other words, my job involved reviewing their policies and procedures manual and operational manuals to ensure that they complied with the requirements of the contract and the applicable DOD regulations so I interacted with department heads and the vice presidents of the company.”

While working at Northrop Corporation in 1975, Retired Major William Whitmire, Jr. (then a Captain) earned the Air Force Commendation Medal for the “application of his outstanding managerial and technical skills (which) led to significant policy changes which improved contractor performance while reducing costs of the F-5 International Fighter...”

Life in the Military

For Retired Major William Whitmire, Jr., life in that military was like being a civilian except that he wore a uniform. There was only one time he was away from his family for more than two months, and that was when he returned to George Washington University in Washington, D.C. for a period of five months, from September 1972 to January 1973, to finish his master's degree in engineering administration, M.E.A. During that time period, his wife and children, three girls ages six, three, and one, lived with his wife's mother in Ohio while he returned to live with his parents in Washington, D.C. (He got married in 1965.)

He called his wife several times a week, and he would visit his family every so often in Ohio. His family also came to visit him in Washington, D.C. at least once. According to him, it was stressful, because he was away from his family, and there was pressure for him to come up with a thesis.

A couple of times he was away from his family on business attending school for about six weeks. One time he went to Lowry AFB in Denver, Colorado to take a contract management course. Another time he went to an Army base in Richmond, Virginia for a contract negotiation

course. But there were many other times when he was away for a week to two weeks at school, at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio.

There were other times during his military career that were stressful too, but they mostly had to do with getting along with difficult bosses.

Like most military servicemen, he traveled extensively nationally. During leave or his time off, sometimes he would go to a military R & R site; that is a place you go for rest and relaxation. Some of the places visited included Cape Cod in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, Canada, Disneyland, Lake Isabel, San Luis Obispo, and San Diego (the last four locations are all located in California). During his military career, he and his family drove across the United States five times, and as a result he had traveled through most of the states in the country.



Air Force servicemen escorted physically challenged individuals to Disneyland annually.

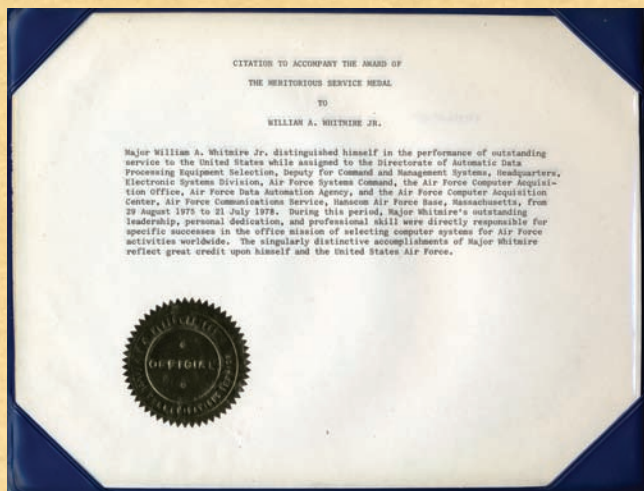
After four years in the military, Retired Major William Whitmire, Jr. fulfilled his commitment to the United States Air Force. However, after this time period, he extended his stay in the military indefinitely. “I decided to make it a career, because I was doing the things that I enjoyed and things that I recognized that I probably wouldn’t be able to do on the outside. I got a real broad work experience and a broad view of the world by being in the military. Besides overseeing the development of high tech equipment, high-tech systems, I got a chance to run a school for instance.”

From 1975 to 1983, he was stationed at Hanscom AFB in Bedford, Massachusetts. Initially, he was a contract negotiator in the ADPE, Automated Data Processing Equipment, Directorate from 1975 to 1978. “That is what they used to call computers. In this directorate, we purchased computers, mainframe and mini-computers, for the Air Force.”

On August 15, 1978, then Major William Whitmire, Jr. received The Meritorious Service Medal for providing “outstanding leadership, personal dedication, and professional skill (that) were directly responsible for specific successes in the office mission of selecting computer systems for Air Force activities worldwide.”

Then he was in Engineering. He was a project manager for about a year for the Satellite Communications Terminal for the AFSATCOM Program. This was one of the programs he was associated with during his first California tour.

Then he was asked by the Air Force Logistics Command to be the Deputy Program Manager for Logistics, a DPML, for the AFSATCOM Program, and he reported directly to a three-star General stationed at Wright-Patterson AFB, who was responsible for the overall program. Major Whitmire was responsible for ensuring that satellite terminals were in fact provided



The citation for The Meritorious Service Medal Major William A. Whitmire, Jr. was awarded in 1978.

to all the necessary users around the world. The terminals he was talking about were put on different kinds of aircraft, ships, man packs, and portable antennas. Some of the airplanes were Reconnaissance 135's, FB-111's, and B-52's. Some of the ships were aircraft carriers and destroyers. He held that position from 1979 to 1981. He enjoyed that assignment, because he got a chance to spend some time at the Pentagon. He took trips to the Pentagon to do planning for the AFSATCOM program as well as to brief the Air Force Counsel, six two-star Generals.

From about 1981 to 1983, he was asked to run a master degree level program management school. He was an adjunct professor at the Air Force Institute of Technology located at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio.

Then in 1983, he was transferred back to the Los Angeles Air Force Station in California. From 1983 to 1985, he was a project manager for an advanced data recorder that went into a spy satellite. The CIA, Central Intelligence Agency, was the program manager. "We in the Air Force helped them design the satellite, launch it, and coordinate all the management for the program. I prepared the management plan for 16 different organizations."

From 1985 to 1987, he served as the Deputy Program Management for this program, the super secret spy satellite. He had a security clearance from the time he entered in the Air Force in 1967. However, when he went to work on this super secret spy satellite program, he had to get an EBI, an extended background investigation. Once he passed that he received a top secret security clearance in 1983.

Life After Military Service

On October 1, 1987, Major William A. Whitmire, Jr. retired from the Air Force after 20 years of service. He received another Meritorious Service Medal. "He distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as Deputy Director of Engineering and as Deputy Program Management, Defense Dissemination System Program Office, Headquarters Space Division, Los Angeles, California... In this important assignment, the leadership, exemplary foresight and ceaseless efforts consistently demonstrated by Major Whitmire resulted in significant contributions to the effectiveness of the Defense Dissemination Program."

After retirement, he worked for about a year at the Space and Technology Division of TRW in Redondo Beach, California and was a project

manager on the TDRS Program, Tracking and Data Relay Satellite Program. That was one of the satellites that blew up in the Challenger mishap, and the program he was on was a NASA program which was to replace that satellite that was destroyed on the Challenger.

After that program was downsized due to decreased funding, Retired Major William Whitmire, Jr. landed a position at Shultz Steel Company, a forging company. They produced parts (primarily engines) for both military and commercial aircraft and rockets. He was the Director, Program Management, for a project that involved coordinating about 17 different agencies around the country to develop a software program to automate the forging process. The idea was to produce a program using artificial intelligence that would aid a designer in designing a forging instead of solely relying on individuals with extensive corporate and technical expertise, because the individuals with this knowledge were becoming more and more rare.

After about five years, the project was essentially complete, and Retired Major William Whitmire, Jr. separated from the company.

His position at Shultz Steel Company was the last full-time position he held. Until about 2000, he worked for himself refereeing soccer, diving,

swimming, and water polo at the high school, club, college, and international level.

When looking back over his military career, he said, "I enjoyed it. It was a great run."



Major William A. Whitmire, Jr. with his wife and five children at his retirement ceremony in 1987.

Military/Civilian Career

1957-1959	Junior ROTC (High School)
1959-1964	ROTC (Howard University)
Summer 1962	ROTC Summer Camp, Columbus, OH
Summers 1962 & 1963	Harry Diamond Laboratories, Washington, D.C. White House Student Trainee (Government Intern)
1964-1967	Harry Diamond Laboratories, Washington, D.C. Research Electronic Engineer (full-time)
September 1967	Reported for Active Duty in the United States Air Force
1967-1972	Stationed at Los Angeles Air Force Station in CA Space and Missile Systems Organization
1973-1975	Stationed at Air Force Plant Representative Office Northrop Corporation in Hawthorne, CA
1975-1983	Stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford, MA
1983-1987	Stationed at the Los Angeles Air Force Station in CA The Space Division
October 1, 1987	Retired from the United States Air Forces after 20 years
1987-1988	TRW, Redondo Beach, CA Space and Technology Division
1988-1993	Shultz Steel Company in South Gate, CA

