

Robert Earl Forgy, Jr.

1920 – 1990



Robert Earl Forgy, Jr. was born on July 8, 1920 at Long Beach, California. His parents, Robert Earl and Lena Marie Walker Forgy, originally from Kansas, eventually moved the family back to El Dorado. Earl, Jr. had a brother, Jack, and a sister, Mrs. Ellis G. Cheney. The 1910 census also lists an older brother, William.

The family made their home at 415 N. Taylor; in 1944 they lived at 307 N. High. As an adult, Earl Forgy, Jr. lived at 1670 Arizona in El Dorado.

After graduating from the University of Kansas in 1942, Forgy entered the Naval Aviation program. He was commissioned an ensign, designated a naval aviator with the Jayhawk Squadron on June 4, 1943.

In September on 1943, Forgy married the former Marjorie Anne McKay in El Dorado. The couple had one daughter, Marilyn. Following his wife's death in 1981, Forgy married Evelyn Walker of San Diego, California.

Serving with distinction during World War II as a twin-engine torpedo bomber pilot in the Pacific theater, Forgy later joined the Naval Air Reserve, remaining until his retirement.

He also owned and managed Lasting Furniture and Carpet, an El Dorado home furnishings store located at 120 West Central. He purchased the business in 1951, and then joined the firm in 1953.

In 1981, the business was sold to Ed Brungardt and Duane Van Horn, and Forgy moved to Arizona, then California.

Earl Forgy, Jr. died on January 13, 1990 in San Diego, CA, his last residence. He was buried with full military honors at El Camino Memorial Park, San Diego.

CONNECTION TO BUTLER COUNTY

“Junior” Forgy, as he was known in high school, attended local El Dorado schools. He graduated from El Dorado Senior High School in 1938, at which time he entered the University of Kansas.

Except for the brief time in California, Earl Forgy, Sr. lived most of his life in Butler County, engaged in the newspaper and printing business. The 1910 census lists him as a farmer; at one time, he was in the service station business.

In his earlier years, Earl, Sr. was connected with the earlier newspapers in El Dorado, especially the Republican. Later, for 22 years, he worked for the Times Publishing Company, first as advertising manager, then as manager.

COMING TO / LEAVING THE AREA

Earl, Jr. came to El Dorado as a child when his parents returned from California. He grew up in El Dorado, leaving to attend college in Lawrence, Kansas.

After the war, he returned to El Dorado where, aside from active time with the Naval Reserves, he lived until his wife’s death in 1981. Leaving Kansas for good, he eventually moved to California.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Earning his ensign’s commission and Navy “wings” in 1943, Forgy flew patrol missions in the Southwest Pacific during World War II with the VPB-101 Squadron.

He flew combat missions over the Philippines, the South Central Pacific, the South China Sea and throughout the Southwest Pacific until the end of the war. Stationed out of Coronado, California in 1944, he was released from active duty in January of 1946.

Following the war, Forgy was active in the Naval Air Reserve at Olathe Naval Air Station for twenty years. Piloting patrol planes, he rose to command a patrol squadron and the Naval Air Reserve Staff, and then became Senior Officer and Coordinator of the Commanding Officer’s Training and Support Component at the Olathe Station.

This command is located outside Olathe, Kansas, where it manages Naval Reserve activities in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. The command is responsible for the mobilization readiness training of approximately 4000 Naval Reserve personnel, performing drills at 18 Naval Reserve centers in as many cities.

During Forgy's time as executive officer and commanding officer of Patrol Squadron 881, the squadron won the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award in 1956 and 1960. The award is given to only one squadron per year by type.

From 1961-1962, Forgy was assistant air wing commander for operations in Air Wing 881. As a pilot in 1961, Forgy and his aircrew set an all-time long-distance non-stop flight record when he flew a P2V "Neptune" patrol plane from Barber's Point Naval Air Station in Hawaii to Olathe. This record still stands for this type of aircraft – approximately 3,600 nautical miles flown in 18.3 hours.

In 1962, Forgy established the Anti-Submarine Operations Control Center at Olathe. In 1963 his Anti-Submarine Operations Control Center was judged the best in command.

Becoming the chief of staff of Air Wing 881 in 1965, followed by air wing commander in 1966, when his tour ended in 1968 Forgy became senior member and coordinator of Olathe's Commanding Officer's Training and Support Component.

On August 20, 1968, Forgy and Reserve Commander Bob Mitchum of Overland Park were flying Capt. F. C. Newlick from Olathe, where the three were based, to the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station near Long Beach, California.

Then Captain Forgy piloted the UC45J utility transport to an emergency touchdown after circling Sky Harbor in Phoenix, Arizona in an effort to lower its stuck left landing gear. Air National Guard units foamed a section of the taxiway for the landing. The partially lowered right landing gear collapsed on impact, forcing the plane to land on its belly; the captain managed to keep the plane from a ground loop.

Forgy said that on his final approach to the runway, a warning light indicated landing gear malfunction. "We tried all emergency procedures with no success, and after repeated efforts we attempted to land at a military field."

He decided to land at Sky Harbor after being informed of 50-mph winds at Luke Air Force Base northwest of Phoenix. Williams Air Force Base had been discounted due to a short fuel supply. The pilot called it "a fairly normal landing. In this case it was a matter of knowing there were no wheels under you. There was no thought or emotion other than landing. We were just too busy." The plane suffered minor structural and engine damage; none of the crew was hurt. The feat inspired featured stories and pictures of the captain and the transport in newspapers across the country.

Later that same month, Forgy, upon the completion of his maximum 2-year assignment, was relieved as commander of the Olathe Naval Air Reserve Staff. He was then assigned as Senior Member and Chairman of the Training and Support Component – an advisory committee directly responsible to the Chief of Naval Air Reserve Force, located in Glenview, Illinois.

Forgy joined the Flag Support Unit of Chief of Naval Air Reserve Force based at the Glenview Naval Air Station in 1971. Following selection to flag rank, he joined the Flag Support Unit of Chief of Naval Reserve in New Orleans.

In 1971, while on active duty, he was one of twelve captains selected for the Senior Reserve Officer Orientation Program, visiting major Naval commands in San Diego and southern California. This comprehensive training program included underway cruises on various Navy combatant ships, highlighted by an undersea voyage on a nuclear submarine. Top-level briefings by senior staff officers of the various forces and commands reflected the current role of the Navy in national defense strategy.

San Diego area shore facilities visited included Miramar and North Island Naval Air Stations, the Amphibious Base, and Submarine Development Group One. Elsewhere, he visited Mine Flotilla Three at Long Beach Naval Station, where he was briefed on the missions and tasks of the Pacific Mine Forces, and the Pacific Missile Range, the site of the Navy Aircraft Test and Evaluation Command.

A day at sea was spent aboard the attack carrier USS Constellation. Forgy also embarked on the USS Mahan, at the time one of the newest guided missile frigates, where he observed a missile exercise. He spent a day afloat on the USS Juneau, an amphibious assault ship capable of beaching nearly 1,000 Marines with their battle gear, and an undersea voyage aboard nuclear attack submarine USS Snook. Forgy experience the rare pleasure of piloting the ship while underway, which is said to be quite similar to flying an aircraft.

Forgy was promoted from Captain to Rear Admiral in 1974. After his promotion to flag rank, Adm. Forgy was assigned to the Chief of Naval Reserve's Flag Support Unit at New Orleans, serving as the Area Representative for the Commander of the Naval Air Reserve Force, also based at New Orleans. He had cognizance over the Naval Air Stations at Dallas and New Orleans, Naval Air Reserve detachments at Houston and Olathe, and the Naval Air Reserve Unit at Memphis.

On October 16, 1975, Admiral Forgy presided at the Navy Day Bicentennial held in Topeka, Kansas, as the principal guest and featured speaker at a Rotary Club luncheon, and at a ceremony at City Hall where the ship's bell of the light cruiser USS Topeka was presented to the city. This bell had been rescued from a New Orleans Scrap Metal Company that purchased the ship after it's final decommissioning. The ship, constructed in 1944, saw action in World War II and Korean. It was re-commissioned as a Guided Missile Cruiser during the Vietnam War.

While in Topeka, Forgy presented plaques to two junior high students who wrote prize-winning essays on “Patriotism ‘76 – Past and Present”, a contest sponsored by the Naval Reserve.

The date of the ceremonies commemorated the day in 1917 when O. K. Ingram, the US Navy’s first enlistee casualty of World War I, was killed in action aboard ship in the North Atlantic while saving the lives of several shipmates, earning him the distinction of being the first Navy enlisted man to have a ship – the destroyer Ingram – named for him. The actual Navy Day Bicentennial was on October 13, the date in 1775 when the Continental Congress first authorized the outfitting of naval vessels, creating the Continental Navy.

In October of 1976, Forgy assumed command of the Naval Reserve Readiness Command Region. In addition, he was the designated area representative for the Chief of Naval Air Reserve Force in the South Central Region, including units at Dallas, New Orleans, Memphis, Olathe, Houston and Denver.

In 1978, while conducting the semiannual inspection of Wichita’s 200-man reserve unit, Forgy found most local reservists were Navy veterans. Other military reserve units had been facing drops in membership, but the Wichita Naval Reserve unit had exceeded its recruitment quota. Forgy said the Wichita unit was the most outstanding in the five-state region.

“The average active duty time served by members of the Wichita and Hutchinson reserve units is eight years,” Lt. Cmdr. Charles Tidwell, head of the Wichita center, said. “After a few years of service aboard . . . the reservists will know the ship better than her own crews. Naval reservists are assigned to a ship for a number of years. The regular crews are relatively transitory. They come and go. Reservists serve on the same ship years after year, on their annual active duty training periods.”

In clarifying what he called some common misconceptions about Naval Reserve service, Forgy explained, “All the air transport activities in the Navy are handled by reserves. And 90 percent of all mines-sweeping is done by the reserve, as well as 35 percent of all anti-submarine patrolling.” He added that all patrol boat work done on rivers in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War was done by reservists.

AWARDS, RECOGNITION

Admiral Forgy received the Legion of Merit medal in ceremonies at the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Center in Kansas City, Missouri in December of 1978, for “exceptional meritorious conduct in performance of outstanding service as the commander of Naval Reserve Readiness Command Region 18 from October 1976 through September 1978”. The award was presented by Admiral Thomas B. Hayward, then Chief of Naval Operations, the Navy’s top sailor.

Besides the Legion of Merit, Forgy's military decorations include three air medals: the Navy Unit Commendation, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two battle stars and the Asiatic-Pacific Theater Ribbon with three battle stars. He was also awarded the Victory Medal, Naval Reserve Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, and a unit citation for his wartime squadron, VPB-101.

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