

Robert M. Smith

Former SMPTE President Robert M. Smith, who retired in 2015 as the president of DuArt Film and Video in New York after 62 years with the company, died on Friday, 11 January 2019, surrounded by his wife of 65 years, Edna, his daughter Janice, and family members. He was 88 years old.

Smith served as SMPTE president for the 1979–1980 term, a pivotal time of change and growth for SMPTE. He was instrumental in expanding the Society's scope and prestige, notably on the international stage. He and Edna travelled the world extensively on behalf of SMPTE, including to China, building on U.S. President Nixon's earlier diplomatic breakthrough.

Smith was born and raised in Albany, New York. He got his start in photography in high school during World War II. He joined the camera club at Christian Brothers Academy in Albany, where he learned to use a Speed Graphic 4 × 5. By the age of 16, while still in school, he worked as a press photographer for the *Associated Press*, New York, an opportunity made possible by a wartime shortage of professional photographers.

He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1948 to 1952, where he attended combat camera school and was trained in aerial reconnaissance.



His crew operated 35-mm Mitchells and 16-mm gun cameras, and they developed their own black-and-white film footage on Houston Fearless machines. Based in Saipan at one point, Smith did flyovers of the atomic tests in the Marshall Islands, including the Bikini Atoll and Enewetak Atoll. He was responsible for a 35-mm Mitchell camera placed on a Japanese heavy cruiser that was sacrificed in the tests. While in the Air Force, he also participated in the Berlin Airlift to bring supplies to the people of West Berlin after the Soviet blockade.

In 1953, Smith answered a help-wanted advertisement in the *New York Times* placed by the DuArt Film Laboratory. He interviewed but, by his own telling, was not their first choice. When the first choice failed to show up, however, Smith got

the job. At first, he was hired as a laboratory control man, in charge of sensitometry, but by 1956, he became a supervisor. He became DuArt Film Laboratory's vice president in 1965, then president in 1994.

In the mid-1950s, when CBS News was a major account for DuArt, Smith went on the road to supervise the remote installation of portable black-and-white developing machines for 16-mm black-and-white reversal. Then, the medium was used for news coverage of events like the World Series or NASA's Mercury launches. Under Smith's guidance, these were temporarily installed and operated in empty stores, people's basements, and once aboard a Pan American double-decker aircraft.

Smith was also a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and attended many Academy Awards ceremonies, including the one in 1979 at which DuArt Film Laboratory was honored with an Academy Award for technical achievement for the invention of a computerized frame-cueing system to facilitate the color correction of motion picture film.

Smith was a resident of Montvale, New Jersey, where for many years he served as a councilman and member of the Montvale Fire Department. He was also Montvale's Fire Commissioner.

—David Leitner

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