

RAMBLE PICTURES FOOTAGE

There is a nice video capture of the event, thanks to Jimmy and Elizabeth of Ramble Pictures. Enjoy if you have the time and click on the link;

<https://vimeo.com/381715685>

LEAD UP / SANDY GUY INDEBTEDNESS;

Due in no small part from esteemed individuals in this group, the Boxer 22 Reunion was given notice at the highest levels of the USAF. Gen David Goldfein, current CSAF, was made aware of the Boxer 22 Reunion, quickly expressed his regrets, and then notified the current AETC Commander, Lt Gen Brad Webb to attend. Gen Webb was an amazing addition, especially considering his H-53 Jolly background. (Additionally, his father was a Vietnam era wild weasel guy) His enthusiasm to support this event and his speech at the dinner was a warm welcome and sincere honor. He also brought his vice, Maj Gen Jeannie Leavitt, (first female fighter pilot in the Air Force) who brought her own impressive presence. It was very nice to have support from the highest levels. My planning details became much easier with the willing and enthusiastic support of his professional staff. Gen Webb's staff immediately helped us with programs, event layout, and technical support. Very nice!

FLIGHT

The 12th Flying Training Wing under the "Freedom Flyer" rules, executed an "Honor Flight" of two T-38s. On the 50th Anniversary of one of the largest CSAR events in history, Woodie Bergeron (Boxer 22B), and Cadet William Danielson (grandson of Boxer 22A) were able to re-create a successful "Boxer 22" Danielson/Bergeron flight. My Navy background appreciates the immensity of the moment and how amazing that USAF leadership, through the Honor Flight Program, allowed this event to happen. In 2011, in a previous Boxer 22 tribute event I was able to fly along with Jim George under the same rules. This makes my son Will the 3rd generation Danielson to fly in a T-38. (Since he hopes to get a pilot slot, we hope it isn't his last!) It was a full-on class move by the USAF and 12th FTW. There is no way to make up for the loss of a man (or the man that died trying to rescue him), but this gesture sure felt good. Many wonderful things have come to fruition from this story, and this is yet again another reason to be thankful for the grace and support of good people. We celebrated that fact on December 5 and I have no shame for spending so much of my time and energy extolling the virtues of a service (USAF) that this Naval officer (ret) spent a lot of time in rivalry with. The USAF ability to remember their past serves them very well and we were truly a grateful benefactor. Amazing program!

DINNER

I kept my promise of free dinner for all veterans. It was a very small price to pay in thanks for their service. My objective was to honor all of those who participated in Boxer 22. I have and will continue to state that the legacy of Boxer 22 cannot be attributed to any one individual. The greatness of this story lies in the team of people who were willing to do whatever might be required for mission accomplishment. We know that in participation in Boxer they had signed and prepared for the possibility of cashing that blank check that was written for up to the cost of their own life. They took that risk without hesitation. The sacrifice made for the life of another comrade underlies what makes Boxer a special story, and no matter the role, we attempted to honor those who served in any capacity. The gravity of the sum commitment cannot be overstated in Boxer 22. "All for one!"

We were able to mention and honor the ultimate sacrifices of Boxer 22. Ben Danielson's family was full in attendance, as was the sister and niece of A1C Davy Davison. Like so many times over the years, grief was subsided in no small part by the company of those who shared in service. If alleviating the grief of the Danielson and Davison families was the only objective achieved during the reunion then the event would have been a success, but I believe it was also an acknowledgement of EVERYONE in Boxer 22 that made the event successful.

My comments were that in the 50 year life cycle of Boxer 22, the story has changed from a viewed tragedy (my personal account), to a story that can be served to educate and inspire. I truly believe that "inspiration"

happened on the night of 5 December, 2019. The participation of Brig Gen John Wilkinson as “host” and speaker, as well as the words of Gen Webb certainly facilitated that. They were able to effectively communicate the honor to be bestowed as well as the gravity of the contributions and sacrifices that were made during Boxer 22. Considering the proper treatment that was denied them as Vietnam Veterans, I consider that to be significant. The Boxer 22 veterans in attendance and their introductions and stories were the education and made the night so special.

PANEL

On 6 December, in front of a large crowd of active duty USAF personnel, the Boxer 22 survivor, 2 Sandy Pilots, 2 Jolly Pilots, and 2 PJ/Flight Engineers gave excellent accounts of the Boxer 22 story. I feel very passionate about the ability of the Boxer 22 story’s ability to provide requisite lessons of honor and sacrifice. It is so important to translate that message to today’s Airman and I will continue to press for opportunities to tell this story to a larger audience. The amount of post panel comments and thank yous confirmed that the speakers completed our objectives. It was noticed that every panel participant gave UNSOLICITED expressions of immense gratitude to the Sandy pilots for their professionalism and skill and credited them for saving their lives. It was an honor to be a conduit that allowed the Sandys and Jolly/PJ crews to receive overdue credit. Perhaps the perfect quote to capture the gravity of Sandy/Jolly bravery was from Woodie Bergeron himself;

“I am not the hero. The heroes were the guys that came to get me. When my chute opened, I said to myself, ‘I wouldn’t come in this valley to get me.’ The valley just roared with gun fire.”

Sandy/Jolly/PJ bravery validated!

POST PANEL HAPPY HOUR

A retired Navy Officer played crud. I was forced (compelled) to abandon my previous pledge to never play that game but suffice to say, I was caught up in the moment! (and of course I will retire undefeated thanks to Jim George, John Wilkinson, and Chuck Kennedy) After all the events, I am proud to say that the retirees outlasted most of the active duty at closing time at the Randolph Officers Club! It was very fun to socialize, and I truly enjoyed being able to enjoy additional conversation. Any time a Vietnam Veteran makes the comment “I am actually tired of hearing ‘thank you’”, then you know we accomplished something important.

POST EVENT CHARTER

I would like to close with my gratitude to all of you who have paved the path for my service as well as for your contribution in trying to rescue my father. I consider myself very lucky to have gotten to know you. After so many years of unknowing, the honor of meeting you and getting to say thanks is surreal and humbling. Like I said previously, there is no replacement for the loss of a father, but getting to know those whose bravery almost got him out of one of the most dangerous situations in military history has provided a grateful measure of relief. The beauty of Boxer 22 is that people in this country will step up when a situation calls for it and attempt to give their all for another one in need. Over the course of the 50 years, this concept applies well past the battlefield. Boxer 22 also reinforces the importance our country places on the value of a human life through the POW/MIA years of search and eventual repatriation. It reminds us of the power we possess as Americans when we sacrifice for a common good and also reminds us that we are always better when we come together for those in need. We can bemoan the problems that exist in this country, but maybe we should take some time to look at the goodness that is around us. It exists in spades in participants of the 50 years of Boxer 22. I am but a beneficiary of the best of all of you. Your service has inspired me (and now future generations) and given me motivation to keep going when common sense would have told otherwise. It was an honor to celebrate Boxer 22 with all of you.

-God bless you all,

