

Military Aviator Tribute or...In Victory you Deserve Champagne, In Defeat Your Need It!

As we get older and we experience the loss of old friends, we begin to realize that maybe we aren't bullet-proof, Pilot's won't live forever, not so bullet-proof anymore. We ponder...if I were gone tomorrow did I say what I wanted to my Brothers. The answer was no! Hence, the following few random thoughts.

When people ask me if I miss flying, I always say something like, "yes! I miss the flying because when you are flying, you are totally focused on the task at hand. It's like nothing else you will ever do (almost)." But then I always say, "However, I miss the Squadron and the guys even more than I miss the flying."

Why you might ask? They were a bunch of aggressive, wise ass, cocky, insulting, sarcastic bastards in smelly flight suits who thought a funny thing to do was to fart and see if they could clear a room. They drank too much, they chased women, they flew when they shouldn't, they laughed too loud and thought they owned the sky, the bar, and generally thought they could do everything better than the next guy. Nothing was funnier than trying to screw with a buddy and see how pissed off they would get. They flew planes and helos that leaked, that smoked, that broke, that couldn't turn, that burned fuel too fast, that never had autopilots or radars, and with systems that were archaic next to today's new generation aircraft. All true!

But a little closer look might show that every guy in the room was sneaky smart and damn competent and brutally handsome! They hated to lose or fail to accomplish the mission and seldom did. They were the laziest guys on the planet until challenged and then they would do anything to win. They would fly with wing tips overlapped at night through the worst weather with only a red light to hold on to, knowing that their Flight Lead would get them on the ground safely. They would fight in the air knowing the greatest risk and fear was that another fighter would arrive at the same six o'clock at the same time they did. They would fly in harm's way and act nonchalant as if to challenge the grim reaper.

When we went to another base we were the best Squadron on the base as soon as we landed. Often we were not welcomed back. When we went to the O'Club we owned the bar. We were lucky to have the Best of the Best in the military. We knew it and so did others. We found jobs, lost jobs, got married, got divorced, moved, went broke, got rich, broke something and the only thing you could really count on was if you needed help, a fellow pilot would have your back.

I miss the call signs, nicknames, and the stories behind them. I miss getting lit up in an O'Club full of my buddies and watching the incredible, unbelievable things that were happening. I miss the crew chiefs saluting as you taxied out onto the flight line. I miss the lighting of the afterburners, if you had them, especially at night. I miss the going straight up and straight down. I miss the cross-countries. I miss the dice games at the bar for drinks. I miss listening to BS stories while drinking and laughing till my eyes watered and my stomach hurt.

I miss three-man lifts. I miss naps in the Squadron with a room full of pilots working up new tricks to torment the sleeper. I miss flying upside down in the Grand Canyon and hearing about flying so low boats were blown over. I miss coming into the break room and looking over and seeing three wingmen tucked in tight ready to make the troops on the ground proud. I miss belches that could be heard in neighboring states. I miss putting on ad hoc Air Shows that might be over someone's home or farm in far-away towns.

Finally I miss hearing DEAD BUG being called out at the bar and seeing and hearing a group of men hit the deck with drinks spilling and chairs being knocked over as they rolled in the beer and kicked their legs in the air, followed closely by a Not Politically Correct Tap Dancing and Singing spectacle that couldn't help but make you grin and order another round!

I am a lucky guy and have lived a great life! One thing I know is that I was part of a special, really talented bunch of guys doing something dangerous and doing it better than most. Flying the lost beautiful, ugly, noisy, solid aircraft ever built. Supported by ground troops committed to making sure we came home again! Being prepared to fly and fight and die for America. Having a clear mission. Having fun.

We box out the bad memories from various operations most of the time but never the hallowed memories of our fallen comrades. We are often amazed at how good war stories never let the truth interfere and they get better with age. We are lucky bastards to be able to walk into a Squadron or a Bar and have men we respect and love shout out our names, our call signs, and know that that this is truly where we belong. We are pilots. We are Few and we are Proud.

I am privileged and Proud to call you Brothers. Push It Up! And Check SIX!

Author Unknown