

November 30, 2011

Dear Kiley,

*I wanted these wings to be included in your shadow box, because for a short while I flew with your Grandfather and was a member of the crew on the day he and two others were lost. I had only been in Southeast Asia about a month and a half and was new to the crew, so I didn't get to know Rod for very long. I know that he was respected by the crew for his judgment and skill in a complex environment, and was well liked and trusted by those who knew him.*

*Our airplanes flew with a crew of ten, three of which were navigators. Rod was the "Table Nav" on our aircrew, and responsible for navigating the aircraft for the whole mission. The Table Nav was also a sort of mission commander who coordinated the targets we found and gave final approval to fire. The other two navigators were the ones who operated the sensors to find the targets in the dark.*

*On the last mission, we were flying in the daytime and our aircraft was struck by anti-aircraft fire. When the situation was going downhill quickly, with fire streaming back from the wing and the airplane barely controllable, Rod was a calm voice on the intercom and on the radio, giving headings to the pilot and making sure that rescuers would be aware of our situation. The entire crew was remarkably composed and he helped us stay that way. I'll always remember him as a very professional officer and cool headed under fire.*

*As for these wings - these were the last ones I wore in the Air Force and they have traveled with me over much of the world. When a flier earns them, they are worn proudly because they mean the person has achieved a cherished goal and has now joined a rather special group. Over time the wings become such a part of your everyday life that they become a part of you, and barely noticed.*

*But I believe the wings also bring with them a duty to serve, and to wear them shows that you accept a responsibility for more than yourself. Usually that duty is just a part of your everyday life. But sometimes, because you wear the wings, you are expected to stand forward and accept a more significant burden. The wings proclaim you will. Your grandfather certainly did. You can always be proud of him.*

Sincerely,

*(hand signed - Larry Barbee)*