

Old Nav Wings Shine Again!

Captain Rod Slagle was the Table Navigator and one of three crewmembers lost on Stinger 41 when it was shot down while defending An Loc on May 2, 1972. Life finally went on for Barbara Barker (Rod's wife) and their daughter Traycee, and a few years ago Barbara decided to put together some Shadowboxes about Rod's career for her three Grand-kids, Kylie, Kendall, and Cole. She contacted a local Shadowbox maker, George Charette, who was intrigued with Barbara's plans and Rod's service. The Shadowboxes started to come together, with George working the shadowbox frames, and with medals, insignia, aircraft patches, flags – everything except a set of silver Senior Navigator Wings.

Barbara wanted to get the correct wings, so she called some Stinger friends and before you could say 'please', Bob Wells, Larry Barbee, and Cash McCall were offering a set of their own Nav Wings, accompanied by a personal letter, for the Grandkid's shadowboxes. Bob had been Rod's room-mate; Larry was NAV/NOS on Stinger 41 when it was shot-down; and Cash McCall had been stationed with Rod. Each one wrote a letter to their selected Grand-child, and those came from their hearts. Let me quote the last part of one of their letters:

As for these wings, these were the last ones I wore in the Air Force and they have travelled with me over much of the world. When a flier earns them, they are worn proudly because it means 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 sense of 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."

Our AC-119 Gunship Association is about old and new friendships, and our place in history. We remember - and will never forget - our brothers we lost. Yes, we've lost loved ones and friends, and hopefully we'll enjoy our old friendships and make some new ones as we continue. For Reunions, we try to find a theme as a focus for that Reunion. As far as themes go, it doesn't get much better than "these old Nav Wings that will shine forever".