

MEMORIAL DAY MESSAGE FROM THE GRAND COMMANDER

Sir Knights and Ladies of Ohio. Please forgive me, but this will be a lengthy article. Memorial Day is special to me, and I want to elaborate on the events which took place in April at the wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. I promised you then that I would follow up on the story of the 16 black ribbons and Memorial Day seems like the perfect time for me to do that.

To refresh your memory, I asked each of the four wreath presenters at the Tomb of the Unknowns to carry four black ribbons during the presentation ceremony. Each of the ribbons bore the name of a member of the United States military who had lost his life in the service to his country. Here are the names of the presenters and the names on the ribbons that each of them carried.

Lady Diana Olson:

Capt. Harold D. Bishop USA

LCpl Charles R. Olson USMC (KIA Vietnam)

Capt Ralph Gehringer USAF, Hawk 64

Capt David Miller USAF, King 11

Lady Beverly Gallaher:

Lt Col Steve Tullis USAF, King 11

Capt Bill Stogsdill USAF, King 11

Capt Jeff Stevens USAF, Hawk 64

SRA Jeff Beseke USAF, Hawk 64

REPGC R. Thomas Starr:

Capt Tom Bauer USAF, 33 ARRS

1Lt Mike Hodges USAF, 33 ARRS

MSgt Eliud Torres USAF, 33 ARRS

Capt Dallas Adams WVANG, Decoy 81

REPGC Robert Hager:

Maj James Prowell, USAF, 20th SOS.

1 Lt Kurt Schwindt, USAF, O-2

2 Lt Tom Leece ANG, Demon 51

2 Lt Mark Brandt ANG, Demon 51

Captain Harold D. Bishop was Lady Diana's Father and he passed away while serving on active duty in the United States Army. LCpl Charles R. Olson was my cousin. Robbie was a few years older than me, and he was killed in Vietnam by a fragmentation grenade set up as a part of a booby trap. The other fourteen men whose names were on these ribbons were young men who were killed in aircraft accidents while serving in the USAF. I knew every one of them and I had flown with several of them. When I say, "young men," I am not exaggerating. Most of these men were in their mid-twenties when they died. The oldest was 41.

I will try to give you a brief explanation of the circumstance of the accidents that cost these men their lives and then I would like to share a story with you about a mission that three of these men and I flew together.

Capt Ralph Gehringer and I were very good friends. His fiancé Theresa and Diana were great friends too. We would do a lot of things together. We went out on Ralph's boat, went to movies and Diana even cooked Thanksgiving dinner for us all at her townhouse. In fact, Ralph and Theresa were our best friends and they were both in our wedding in August of 1986. Ralph along with Jeff Stevens and Jeff Beseke were killed at Pope AFB, NC when their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter lost power in both engines and crashed while they were on a cross county mission from Eglin AFB, FL to Andrews AFB, MD.

First Lieutenant Mike Hodges was a new pilot. Mike worked for me in the Tactics section of the 33rd ARRS at Kadena AB in Okinawa Japan. Mike, along with my friends Tom Bauer and Eliud Torres were killed when their HH-3 helicopter crashed into the ocean while performing a night water hoist mission. The two pararescueman on board managed to swim clear of the sinking helicopter and were rescued. Tom, Mike and Eliud were trapped in the cockpit and drowned.

Capt Dallas Adams and I were in the same AFROTC detachment at West Virginia University. We later served together as Instructor Pilots at Little Rock AFB, AR. Dallas and his crew were killed when their C-130 from the WV Air National Guard went down while flying a low-level route. First Lieutenant Kurt Schwindt and I were in the same USAF pilot training class. Kurt was a Forward Air Controller (FAC) and was killed with another pilot when his O-2 aircraft suffered a catastrophic structural failure at low altitude. Kurt and his observer were too low to bail out.

Major David Prowell was a Special Operations helicopter pilot. He flew the massive MH-53 Pave Low. Major Prowell was the scheduler for his squadron, and I was the scheduler for my squadron. We would work together almost daily while coordinating air refueling missions between his MH-53's and my HC-130's. Less than a month before he was killed, we had deployed together to Nellis AFB in Las Vegas for a weeklong exercise. Major Prowell and his entire crew were killed when their Pave Low crashed into a ridge line in a storm while on an exercise in the Crow Valley in the Republic of the Philippines.

The C-130 crash that killed 2Lt Leece and 2Lt Brandt was very difficult for me to deal with. My last assignment on active duty was as an Instructor Pilot in the 16th Tactical Airlift Training Squadron, (16 TATS). My job there was to take new pilots, many of whom had never even sat in a C-130 before and turn them into fully qualified 130 pilots in eight weeks. Tom Leece and Mark Brandt were my first two students at the 16 TATS. Both of these Lt's were from Air National Guard units. Tom was from Minnesota and Mark from Missouri. Because they were attending USAF formal flight training, they were both on active-duty orders and had been assigned to train with an active-duty squadron. In addition to the 16 TATS, there was also a squadron from the Arkansas ANG on base which also did C-130 qualification training.

I took Tom and Mark through their initial ground school training and the flight simulator phase of their training. Just before we were scheduled to begin the final phase of their training, actual flight training in the aircraft, they both came to me with a request. They had been talking to some of the ANG guys on base and they had been convinced that they would be better off finishing their training with the guard unit instead of with the active-duty guys (IE, me). They said that they had cleared it with their respective squadrons, but they needed me to sign off on it and release them to finish their training "down the street" with the Arkansas ANG. I checked with the training officer, my ops officer and squadron commander. No one had a problem with the transfer, so I signed off on the paperwork and off they went.

A week later, they, along with four other crew members from Demon 51 were dead. They had crashed while practicing an engine out approach and landing at Greenville, MS. One of the Lt's was in the copilot seat and the Instructor Pilot had reduced thrust on one of the outboard engines to idle to simulate the loss of the engine. While turning into the simulated dead engine to line up with the landing runway the student allowed the airspeed to decrease below the air minimum control speed. The flight engineer noticed the slow speed and shouted "airspeed!" The student in the co-pilots seat shoved the throttles on the three operating engines to max power but left the throttle for the simulated inoperative engine at idle thrust. The asymmetrical thrust immediately rolled the airplane upside down and it crashed just short of the runway.

The accident report stated that one of the contributing factors in the crash was the failure of the instructor pilot to adequately monitor the student and to allow the airspeed to deteriorate to an unsafe condition. Once the student advanced all the operating outboard engine with the opposite engine in idle thrust, the aircraft was not recoverable. I understand that hindsight is always 20-20 and that there is no way to know for sure how I would have reacted in that situation but, I have

spent every day since that accident convinced that I would have not allowed the situation to have deteriorated that far. I truly believe that if those two students had stayed with me to finish their training that they would not have been lost.

The last accident that I will tell you about is the crash of King 11 (pronounced One, One, not eleven). King 11 was an HC-130 flying a low-level training check ride out of Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque, NM. The weather was very bad with lots of wind resulting in strong turbulence and low-level wind shear throughout New Mexico. The weather was so bad that after King 11 took off, the squadron had issued a weather recall for all aircraft due to reported severe turbulence. Due to flying at such low altitude, it is believed that King 11 never received the radio call to return to base. While flying at three hundred feet above the ground and almost 240 mph, King 11 crossed a ridgeline in the Cibola National Forest and encountered severe turbulence. The left wing of the aircraft broke off just inboard of the # 2 engine. The aircraft snap rolled to the left and crashed. The impact was so powerful that it registered on a US Geological Survey seismometer over thirty miles away. Eleven crew members were killed in the crash. Among them were Captain Dave Miller, pilot, Lt Col Steve Tullis, evaluator pilot and Captain Bill Stogsdill, navigator. The reason that this accident is so personal to me is that only 14 months before, Dave, Steve, Bill, and I had been flying together in the same aircraft that they perished in.

Fourteen months before the crash of King 11, in February of 1985, I was enjoying the best assignment that I had ever had in the Air Force. I was attending HC-130 Aircraft Commander training at the 1550th Combat Crew Training Squadron (1550 CCTS) at Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque, NM. The three-month school had started in January and would finish in March. I was a 1LT and I was going through the school as an Aircraft Commander. I was teamed with Captain Dave Miller, my Co-Pilot and 2Lt Clay Griswold, Navigator.

Dave and I were both single and lived in the Visiting Officers Quarters (VOQ) on base. Clay was married and lived in a short-term apartment off-base. As a result, Dave and I became inseparable friends. We did everything together. One weekend we would be sailing Dave's' Hobie Cat on Elephant Butte Lake and the next we would be snow skiing on Sandia Peak. I will never forget the incredible sights while making that last run down Sandia Peak as the sun was setting. The crystal-clear mountain air and the spectacular sunset colors reflecting off of the snow are an image that will remain with me for the rest of my life. One Saturday night, Dave and I attended an REO Speedwagon concert. We got tickets from the recreation center on base for \$10.00. It turns out that the seats were third row, center! On Monday we both thought that we were going to have to go to the Flight Surgeon and get taken off our flight that day. Neither one of us could hear a damn thing!

On the day that I want to tell you about, we were flying a sortie scheduled to perform search patterns and aerial delivery procedures (airdrops). We were operating in an area near Kirtland AFB called the Burriss Ranch Drop Zone. I was in the left seat, Dave Miller was in the right, Major Steve Tullis was the Instructor Pilot in the jump seat and Bill Stogsdill, was in the navigators seat. Bill was an Instructor Navigator and was filling the primary crew position because Clay Griswold

was sick that day. The weather was ok in the DZ, but it was very cloudy and there were heavy snow showers in the mountains to our northeast. About an hour into the mission, we were doing some airdrops when we heard a call from one of the HH-3 Helicopters assigned to the same training wing to which we were assigned. His call sign was Jolly 69, and he was in trouble.

Jolly 69 had been doing what are called pinnacle approaches in the Manzano Mountain Wilderness area. Their HH-3 had developed a serious fuel leak and they did not have enough fuel to get back to Kirtland AFB or to the airport in Socorro NM. They were in a blinding snowstorm and could not see the ground to simply land and wait it out. Jolly 69 needed aerial refueling, and they needed it quickly. I got on the radio and asked them their position. We were only about 25 miles away and I started a turn toward them. Once we were in the turn, I transferred control of the aircraft to Dave, and I began to unstrap and get out of the seat. Since Major Tullis was the IP, I knew that he would want to take over and do the rendezvous, join up and refueling. This was no longer a training mission. Jolly 69 was in serious trouble and needed fuel or they were going down.

As I turned to get out of my seat, Major Tullis said, "what are you doing?," I told him that I was getting up so that he could take his place in the Aircraft Commanders seat. He looked at me and said, "Sit your ass down Lieutenant. This is how you learn to be an Aircraft Commander." First Lieutenants do not argue with Majors, so I sat down, strapped in, and called the Loadmaster and asked him to bring the parachutes and harnesses to the flight deck for us. If we were going to be doing a refueling mission, our regulations required that we have our parachutes "readily available." I took control back from Dave Miller and asked Bill if he could find the helicopter on radar, and he said that he thought that he had them, but he asked Dave, who was working the radios now, to call them and give them a new code for their transponder. As soon as they put in the four-digit code in their transponder, Bill turned on our APX-65 radar interrogator and got a distinct target on his radar scope. Since I had a repeater scope near my left knee, I could see exactly where Jolly 69 was in relation to us.

Bill then gave Dave a heading and altitude to relay to Jolly 69 to bring us both on a rendezvous heading and close the distance between us as fast as possible. HH-3's can be very power limited and since they were already in mountainous terrain, we did not have a lot of altitude to play with. Our normal rendezvous and join up would have had me fly 300 feet above the helicopter and when he had me in sight, he would climb to get in position behind the refueling drogue. On this mission I decided that I would fly 300 feet below the receiver and once we were in position, he could trade altitude for airspeed and descend to the refueling altitude. That way, he would not have to use fuel that he did not have to climb to meet me. We were closing in on each other pretty quickly now and I had the crew run the air refueling pre-contact checklist. We were all set up and ready to go when Bill told me that the receiver was at my 11 O'clock position and two miles. I looked up through the eyebrow window above and to my left and I saw the Jolly just above me and moving to a position on my left wingtip. As soon as he passed abeam of us I rolled into a

45-degree bank, added a little power, and started a turn to catch up with him. In the turn, I lost sight of him in another snow squall, but Bill had him on radar and gave me a heading to roll out.

I finished the turn behind and below Jolly 69 and started to overtake him for the refueling. I told the flight engineer to stream the refueling drogues and be ready to transfer fuel as soon as Jolly 69 was in position. Just before we passed him, I saw the helicopter and made my required radio call, "Jolly 69, King 11 is ½ nautical mile in trail." A few seconds later he called and said that he had me in sight. I acknowledged that King 11 had the lead and cleared him into the pre-contact position on the left drogue. Jolly 69 descended the last 300 feet and moved in behind the refueling drogue with his refueling probe extended from the nose of the helicopter. I cleared him in and within about 30 seconds he was hooked up and taking on fuel. Once we were passing fuel I asked Bill for a heading back to Kirtland and I began a shallow turn back to the base. After several minutes on the drogue, the helicopter had received the full fuel load that they had requested. I cleared them to disconnect but the pilot came back and asked if they could just stay on the drogue until we were back over the base. I found out later that they were concerned that the fuel leak might get worse, and they just wanted to hang on in case they needed more fuel. I said sure and we dragged them back until we could see the runway. At that time Jolly 69 disconnected and made their approach into Kirtland. We cleaned up from our refueling configuration, did all of our required checklists and flew an overhead pattern to a landing.

When we got back to the squadron a very happy helicopter crew was waiting for us. They explained what had happened, thanked us for our help and told us to meet them at the Officers Club at 5 pm. An exceptionally good time was had by all that night!. Although this was not the most dangerous or complicated mission that I ever flew in my career as a rescue pilot, it was particularly important to me. Major Tullis left me in command and said almost nothing during the entire evolution of the mission. He let me fly the airplane and much more importantly, he let me make the decisions. We did some non-standard things that day and he never questioned me or anything that I had done. In our debriefing he told us that we had done an outstanding job and had worked very well together as a crew. I will never forget that day with Dave Miller, Steve Tullis, and Bill Stogsdill. We did an excellent job in a tough situation, and I am very proud to have flown with them.

Fourteen months later, Dave Miller was back at Kirtland doing the same Aircraft Commander course that I had been undergoing in 1985. Dave, Steve, and Bill were killed while flying Dave's check ride. It was the first day that Steve Tullis was wearing his new rank as a Lieutenant Colonel. I know that he had to have been enormously proud. I am the only surviving officer crewmember from that air refueling mission in 1985 and I think about my friends often. Memorial Day is a difficult time for me. Of course, I enjoy the time with family and friends, but I can never forget about the family and friends that I have lost. Rest in Peace my Brothers in Arms. These Things We Do, That Others May Live.

Sir Knights, thank you for your attention and I hope that you all have a safe and meaningful Memorial Day Weekend.