

Memorial Service
For
Captain Herbert C. Crosby
24 May 2007
Ch (COL) William Broome

Introduction: As we begin our Memorial service this evening for Captain Herbert C. Crosby, Herby to all of us, I would like to begin with some fond memories from family and friends. It has been a long time since any of us has seen or spoken to Herby and I feel this will bring back some of the good times.

From Cousin Sharon: When I think of Herby, I always remember the day that he, Grandma Crosby and I buried Grandma's canary, Wimpy, in her flowerbed, near the bird bath. It was a very solemn occasion for the three of us. He and I were probably eight or nine at the time.

From Cousin Pat: I do remember that Herby was one of the cutest babies and little kid. I remember the time he fell out of the car delivering newspapers and broke his leg. I also remember that when you moved to Georgia and your mom had to drive you kids that you, Mary Lou, got sick on the trip and that Herby took care of you while mom drove and that she was very proud of him helping out.

From Cousin Carol: Herby and I were born 10 days apart at Lutheran hospital in Fort Wayne, IN. According to my mother, Aunt Jane checked into the same hospital room on the day that mom was discharged. That did nothing but confuse the nurses, because they thought the Crosby baby was a girl with dark hair....and low and behold, they now had a blonde baby boy. I know that Herby planned that. He liked a good laugh.

That was the beginning of Herby and his way of bringing happiness and humor into our lives.

Our best times were in the summer at Lake Jane when all the family and cousins would gather to play....Herby would race his little racing boat right up on shore....scaring us to death. He would also go over to Bay boats at 0600 and bang on the bell to get gas. He would wake all the people sleeping in their boats on the cove.

Herby brought humor, laughter, and love into our lives. We will always remember the gifts that he gave us....especially our safety and liberty.

From Cousin Ab Crosby: I remember his impish smile, his mischievous sense of humor, his love of boats and water, his love of country and his friendship to all.

From Luke Spooner, a close friend:

Herby was truly the All American boy the way I remember him. When he first moved here we met and I noticed how very well mannered, polite, and respectful he was, and it very evident early on what he thought about his country and flag. He took being a Boy Scout and becoming an Eagle Scout very seriously. He was very respectful of his elders and loved his family. When something serious would come up he depended on his dad. He always had his family at the top of the list.

When we played football our senior year I kicked extra points, Herby was Center, and Mike Bowen played on the team; we were great friends.

Herby was very a positive person. He had a plan to work thru any situation. You never saw the bad side of him.

The last time I saw Herby was in the fall of 1968, after flight school. He and a friend came to spend a football weekend with me at the University of Georgia. We really had a good time and did it right. They were in uniform when they got there. Back then everyone wore sport coats and ties to the games, so they went downtown and bought sport coats and ties so they'd fit in. We had a great time. About three or four months later he went to Vietnam. I got a stack of letters from Herby.

He loved the Beach Boys, they were his favorite group.

When we got out of school I wanted to make him a farmer. But I knew that wasn't what he wanted to do. He was glad to be in the Army, he wanted to be there because he truly loved his country and flag. I think he would have made a career of it and would have excelled. It never crossed my mind that he wouldn't be back. We just thought he would come home.

From Cousin Susan: I remember seeing Herby when he was in Fort Wayne the last time and he was at my house. I have an old hutch/roll top desk piece that was Grandma Crosby's via Elaine. They were going to toss it out and mom told me to go back and get it and redo it. It had a secret drawer in it and Herby showed me where it was. Since then I have not found it but think I will look again now that Herby is back with us.

From Herby's Sister Jane: "He tried to live life to the fullest."

From Mary Lou, Herby's Younger Sister: I was 8 years younger than Herby and I looked up to him as a hero. I started a scrapbook when he left for the Army in 1966, never realizing that it would take 40 years to finish it. The most important thing in my life about Herby is that he saved my life when I was about 5 years old. My parents were building our new home next to Lake Jane in Donaldsonville. I was playing with my doll beside the edge of the water and fell

in. I have vivid memories of being under water, bobbing up and down and then mostly down. A hand reached down and pulled me up, it was Herby.

From Whiz Broome, fellow 71st Aviator and Friend: I have some good memories of Herby that have always stood out clearly in my mind. In fact, I can see him as clearly today as I did almost 38 years ago. Herby would come over to visit with Eric Kilmer and me at our hooch across from the Firebird hooches. I think he liked coming over to talk to the Warrant Officers because he could let his military guard down with us, as we were definitely not RLOs (Real Live Officers). He would walk over, get a beer and stand in the door way talking and laughing with us on a fairly regular basis. He will always be remembered warmly in my thoughts as a friend, as a fellow pilot and as a soldier who was not afraid to do his duty for the country and the people he loved.

One of the best accounts of the day Herby and his crew were lost comes from Gene Waldrip, Firebird Gunner, 1969-70. It reads as follows:

Much of my memory of the 18 months I spent as a door gunner in the 71st AHC is blurred by years of not really wanting to remember. It doesn't take long sitting in the door of a gunship, almost everyday, for war to become very routine, even mundane. Certainly, getting shot at was not notable or worthy of remembering beyond the next gun run. But Jan. 10, 1970, was different. It was one of those memorable times in Viet Nam that I was convinced that I was not going to survive to see another day of war.

My memory of the details is not good, but the circumstances are as vivid in my mind as the day it happened. One of the birds was experiencing some minor mechanical difficulties, so we landed at a special force's camp, Tien Phouc, to check it out. Capt. Crosby changed ships, with his pilot, and decided to fly the ailing bird back to Chu Lai. There are lots of variations of who was there and such, but I believe there were 3 firebird ships. The day was miserable, with low clouds and rain. We were deep in the mountains, and the weather continued to worsen by the minute. We were essentially flying blind.

I only got vertigo one time in Viet Nam, and it was on this day. I had it so bad that I was convinced that both myself and all my gear were going to slide right out the door. I was desperate to convince the pilots to straighten the ship, but thankfully, they relied on their training in horrible flying conditions, and disregarded my potentially fatal input. One frightful moment a hole appeared out my door in the thick clouds, and I saw the jungle just outside. I seemed as if I could reach out and grab a handful of leaves. Just as quickly it was gone again and there was no visible indication of the earth, only thick gray clouds that were eerily encompassing the cabin of the aircraft. It scarred the hell out of me.

There was a lot of chatter on the radio, but I don't recall any of the conversations, only that they were focused on trying to find a hole in the clouds, so we could try to figure out where we were. At some point fuel started becoming a concern. In my mind the options were not good. I was braced for the instant that we flew into an unseen mountain, or, inverted the aircraft because the pilots were trusting in faulty instruments. At least for me, just sitting in the door with no control over what was happening was the worst part. You start to concentrate on the conversation you are having with yourself, instead of the events occurring around you. That probably partly explains why I remember few details about this day, or for that matter, most others in Viet Nam.

At some point, our pilot found a hole in the clouds and took us down thru it and started low leveling. We were able to find our bearings and make our way back to Chu Lai, with not much fuel to spare. I remember the radio attempts to raise Capt. Crosby, but with no success. I was convinced that they would not be far behind us and would soon be touching down at Chu Lai. Eventually, we knew that they could not have had any more fuel and that something was dreadfully wrong. The feeling of relief that you are safe mixed with the numbing reality that your fellow soldiers are not, is one of the most confusing emotions that a person can experience and one that you are unlikely to forget.

Capt. Crosby and his crew were doing their job that day, just like the rest of us. Their circumstances were no different than ours, but for them the outcome was destined to be tragic. We survived, they perished. For me, it is as simple as that. Nothing else needs to be said or known about that day, other than; they served their country honorably and died doing it.

I am thankful for their families that after so many years they can place their loved ones peacefully to rest. It has been a long time coming for Firebird 91 and his crew, but now they are home. God Bless them all.

Now I want to read a letter from Herby to his parents dated 30 May 1969 from Viet Nam: **Read Letter from Herby:**

Transition: It is very apparent that Herby was well loved by both friends and family alike. He valued relationships and felt that his duty was to serve others by serving his country and his flag. He saved a life, if not lives, he became an Eagle Scout and an officer in the United States Army. Any of these alone are worthy of a life accomplishment and yet Herby wanted to be sure his life meant something fighting for right in Viet Nam. It is obvious that Herby had a sense of duty, honor and country and that his service was more than just a job. He took command of the situation as he saw it and tried to bring his ailing bird back home. We will never know what caused the death of the crew of Firebird 91, was it weather, was it enemy fire, or was it a malfunction of the aircraft? It was no ones fault and nothing could have prevented it, it is just an ugly part of war. This is a question

only God knows the answer to. To tell you the truth, these questions are not really important in the course of a life lived in service to others. What matters is what we did with our lives while time was on our side and the relationships we forged while living.

I think all of us feel this way; we all want to know that we will be remembered for something good, something worthwhile in our lives.

Illustration: Do you remember the opening scene in the movie Saving Private Ryan? An old man is standing in front of the grave of one of his officers in WWII and begins to weep and to remember and the movie goes back in time. Then he stands up and asks his wife if he lead a good life because so many died to save him. It was very moving and very human because all of us look back over our own lives and wonder if we ever made a difference.

I want to read you a Bible text found in the book of John, chapter 15, verse 13 as spoken by our Lord, Jesus Christ to his disciples just before he died, **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”**

Today we are gathered to witness the Memorial Celebration for Captain Herbert Crosby because he gave his life for his friends, his family, and his country. The circumstances of his death are not really that important. What is imperative for us to remember is that the day Herby raised his right hand and swore to support and defend the constitution of the United States he chose to give his life for others. He did this freely and openly without hesitation as all of us do who join the military. Do we think about the ultimate fulfillment of that oath with our lives, not usually and not often?

Message: Let me draw you back some 2000 years to another son who gave his life so that others might live in freedom. The Bible tells us that the Father and Son in heaven made a plan that would bring about eternal salvation for anyone who wanted it. The amazing thing about this plan is that it was made before we even had knowledge of Christ so that we would have every opportunity to be saved from our sins, sins that cause a death that has no hope.

Jesus chose to be the fulfillment of an oath that was made all the way back in the Garden of Eden where God said he would have an offspring of Adam and Eve who would strike the final blow to Satan and sin. One man brought salvation into the world thru His life, death and resurrection. That death was for you and for me and it was a life given freely. Christ suffered deep pain and sorrow for our sakes, much more than we can ever comprehend or appreciate.

Herby was afforded the very best equipment and support that his nation had at the time. He had every piece of gear needed to protect and sustain his life and give his mission success. However, equipment was not going to protect Herby and the crew of Firebird 91 in this situation. You see, war is the result of the

fallen nature of human beings, God never intended for there to be war and violence in the world. Sin came as a result of yielding to temptation and things have been getting worse as time goes on. But we need not despair because God has given us heavenly armor to protect us for eternity.

Conclusion: Let me close with a reading of Ephesians 6:10-18, the Armor of God.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **13** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, **15** and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. **16** In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Our country and much of the world are involved today in a Global War on Terrorism and it looks to go on for some time to come. As we see everyday on the news, many will die to make this world a better place, with liberty and justice for all. But that is not the end. There is more to life. Therefore, let us prepare now for the one who is coming, who has already won the victory, who has already written our names in the book of life if we believe on Him. We thank Herby that he gave his life for his country and we count it as important, now I ask you to give you life to Christ and count it as eternal. Thank you for joining us for this Memorial and remembrance.

Let us pray: Eternal Father, our Sustainer and our Protector, We thank you for your steadfast love for us. Jesus demonstrated this powerful love on the cross when he died for us, in our place. We thank you for this Memorial Service for Herbert Crosby and the sacrifice he made for all of us. Be with his family and friends as they close this long chapter in their lives and give them a peaceful conclusion and wonderful memories to take with them. As each of us reflects back on our own lives, grant us insight and honesty to evaluate our relationship with you, with family and with friends and let us bridge and repair our life as needed. Finally Lord, please bless and protect our military as they struggle this very hour with evil and the dark forces that would strip us of our freedoms and dignity. I pray these requests in the name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.