

## Memorial Day 2014

This is Memorial Day 2014. To most of America it is the beginning of summer, a day to celebrate with friends & family but also to honor and remember those who died protecting our freedom. Something we often take for granted.

I want to tell you about a friend of mine, Captain Joseph Patrick Murphy, USMC. Joe was married to Carol Murphy; they had two kids, Kelly and Eric. Joe had a lot of friends, one of those unique individuals that people liked to be around. Joe's son Eric was born while we were in Viet Nam. Eric would graduate from the Air Force Academy and become a jet pilot like his dad.

Joe and I went through the later part of an 18 month long training program to earn our wings as Naval Aviators. After flight training, we were both assigned to VMJ-3, a Photo and Electronic Reconnaissance Squadron at Marine Air Station El Toro, California. He and I were both assistant Operations Officers. We were cross trained to do each other's job. We would be part of a cadre of pilots and support staff to transition from the ageing F-8s to the new RF-4B Phantoms. We worked closely together to do our part to make this happen.

Joe and I became friends. Brenda and I had dinner at their home on many occasions.

Joe taught me a lot of things about flying. He was always first to stick up for me if I was accused of something that he thought was wrong. I was a very good Photo Recon pilot. But that's something I credit myself with. When a mission was critical, it needed to be done and done right; I was one of five pilots in the squadron that was given that critical mission. It wasn't skill that Joe taught me, it was wisdom. For example, he told me when flying on someone else's wing that would require a two plane low level flight, to fly slightly above and behind the lead aircraft. Normal position would be to fly slightly below and behind the leader, much like the Blue Angels do in formation. His logic was that if the leader flew too low and hit some trees, the leader would hit first and I would have a chance to pull up and avoid the lead aircraft's fate. He told me to never forget safety, safety always came first.

He and I picked up brand new F-4 Phantoms from the factory in St. Louis, Missouri to fly back to Marine Corp Air Station, El Toro, California, about 1,500 miles away. There we would train for our deployment to Viet Nam with all new F-4s that would replace the retiring F-8s. As we took off from St. Louis, Joe was the lead pilot. He requested a clearance to Cruise above 31,000 feet (That means to fly at all altitudes above 31,000 without concern from other aircraft. We would own all the airspace above the cleared altitude. This would allow us to accelerate to supersonic speed, about Mach 1.5, and climb a few thousand feet while in after burner. Then we would shut down the after burner and coast down to our cleared altitude and decelerate to about Mach 1.2. Then do it all over again.) That was approved. Then he requested that we be cleared from our present position direct to El Toro. Normally you would fly from one check point to another using radio signals and thereby fly in a less than straight line. Something that is still common today. Since this was not something the air traffic controlled was familiar with, they asked him "Can you do that?" Joe: "Affirmative". Controller: "OK Marine Jet, give me the heading and distance to El Toro". Joe looked at our new "Black Box" and gave them the heading and

distance. There was a period of silence. The controller was checking our numbers to see if we could indeed do what we asked. After a few moments they responded and gave us the clearance and we were able to fly supersonic all the way home and in a straight line. Joe liked new things and all things that were better.

Joe and I flew many training missions together. Usually with Joe in the lead and me on his wing. We were both designated Division Leaders, which meant we were approved to lead flights of 4 aircraft. We were also designated as test pilots, a select few squadron pilots that would fly the aircraft after certain repairs to assure that the repairs were done correctly. Another example of the respect that Joe had as a pilot.

Normally, a Marine squadron would be required to assign one of their pilots to be attached to a similar Navy squadron aboard a carrier. But in the case of the new RF-4B's, the R version aircraft had technology that was not compatible to be based on aircraft carriers at sea. The RF-4s could land and take off from the carrier, but otherwise not compatible to be based on the ship. However, it was decided that our squadron would be given a select few slots to at least Carrier Qualify a limited number of our pilots even though we would not be assigned carrier duty. These slots were highly coveted in the squadron and most of these slots were quickly assigned to more senior officers. Joe and I were told that we could have one slot between us and we would need to decide who got it. We agreed to flip a coin. I won the toss. It bothered me, however that I would get this very coveted slot and not Joe. So the next day I gave my slot to Joe. I met him as he returned to the ready room. He was on cloud nine. This was to be my last chance to land on a carrier. It would have been my third carrier experience and I really wanted to "Hit the Boat" with an F-4. However, I'm still glad I was able to give this to Joe.

When we deployed to Viet Nam, both my wife Brenda and his wife Carol were expecting. Brenda with our first child and Carol Murphy with their second. To save weight on our cross Pacific flight, the cameras were removed from the nose compartment of our F-4s. Joe suggested that since the compartment was empty that we each carry a case of champagne so we could celebrate when our kids were born. Not something that would have been sanctioned by the Marine Corps. Something, however, that everyone sort of ignored. Joe liked to push the boundaries of the rules if he thought there was no harm.

He wrote to Adolph Coors to request that he send some beer to Viet Nam. Joe got an answer back that since Coors beer had to be refrigerated, it was not possible to ship it to Asia. Joe liked to go to the top when solving a problem.

Joe wanted to take a juke box to Danang. He arranged to have a C-130 pilot fly one to us. He was going to install it in the officers' Club in Danang. I don't recall why that didn't work out, but it was classic Joe to try.

After a few months in country, Joe was hand selected by the Group Commander to take over and run the Danang Officers Club. He would have still flown with our squadron, but his "ground job" would have been to run the club. You may ask how the Group Commander decided on Joe. Everybody respected and liked Joe. Joe played the banjo and sang. He formed a band and occasionally entertained at the club.

Captain Murphy had already started making big plans to improve the club. He couldn't wait to get started.

Joe also lead jam sessions in our 16 foot by 24 foot "Hut" where six officers lived. Most huts were divided equally into 6 areas. Each officer got his 8 feet by 8 feet square of space. Joe talked us into dividing our Hut into 2 areas. One for sleeping and one as a living area complete with a full sized refrigerator that was always stocked with beer. It was a favorite hangout and often party central. Much like the TV show "Mash".

Joe told me if anything happened to him, he wanted a party. Joe took off from Danang in our other aircraft, an EF-10B, on a clear sunny afternoon for a routine test flight. In his right seat was Lt. Walt Albright. They never returned. Search and Rescue was launched and later that evening they found the crash site. Just as Joe requested, I went to the O Club and laid down \$100, which was a lot of money in 1967. I told them when that was gone to let me know. I threw quite a party that night, although I only have bits and pieces of it in my mind. I think Joe would have been pleased.

As for the cases of champagne, as it turned out, when I got the news that Carrie was born, I was on a night mission and landed around 3:00 AM. So I went back to my hut and put on my favorite Dion Warwick tape and opened a bottle of champagne by myself, a brand new very happy and proud father of a healthy baby girl. That part of my story was picked up by the US armed forces "Stars and Stripes" newspaper. They sent a reporter to interview me and ran the story in the next edition. Carrie's birth was, quite literally, read around the world. I don't recall what happened to Joe's case of champagne or the rest of my case. But I am sure that none of it was wasted.

I was asked to pack Joe's personal belongings to be shipped home. At Carol's request, special care was given to Joe's banjo to assure it would make it safely home.

I contacted Joe's sister, Norma, when I returned to the US to tell her I was safely back home. I have kept in touch with her over the years. I also contacted Joe's brother Dave "Smoke" Murphy. Smoke made several trips on his Harley with some fellow riders from California to Washington D.C. to visit the wall. He stopped to see me on one of the trips when I was living in Kansas City. I was recently contacted by Carol and we reconnected.

Carrie ran into Kelly at Pepperdine University many years ago when they were both still in collage. I don't recall how they recognized each other but they did.

Kelly took a course on Viet Nam as seen through the eyes of vets. Vets were asked to tell their stories from their point of view. It was an auditorium course and standing room only crowds. They asked if there was anyone in the audience whose dad died in the war. She raised her hand. One of the national news TV programs, I think it was 60 Minutes, contacted her and did an interview. They took her to the Viet Nam Memorial Monument to film a segment and for her to view her dads name on "The Wall". They sent me a copy of the tape.

I think of Joe often and the family that loved him. But mostly I think of the price that Joe paid so I could be free.

Joe and I were good friends. At the time, he was my best friend. But I was not Joe's best friend. Joe had many good friends, perhaps his best friend was Eric Farrell. Joe named his son after Eric. Still, Joe was my friend.

As is fitting Captain Joseph Patrick Murphy, USMC is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

No, I never visited his grave or for that matter "The Wall" where his name and Walt's name are inscribed. It would be too painful and it is just not something I could ever get the courage to do.

Thanks, Joe.

Doug Adams