

If any of you have questions regarding the circumstances regarding Ron's disappearance, please forward them to me whether or not you are attending the reunion in two weeks. I will try to consolidate them and respond to all with a general email.

The subject matter will be related to his MIA status, not to how we intend to find him (that is Dave's domain.) In this email I will provide some background on Ron.

Ron and I were in Monroeville CAP Squadron 604 for two years and I followed him around his Air Force career (two years behind) until he made the huge mistake of asking for an F-16, whereby I took the honorable route flying the only jet ever designed to kill anything that flies, the F-15. I had met Ron when I was 13 and he was 15. I was in CAP Sq 616 in Irwin that was nothing to speak of for Ranger teams, so I started commuting to 604 after Ron and I shared a room at a CAP encampment. We were both intrigued with going to the AF Academy when Ron and I were sharing our first encampment together at the 911th ANG barracks in Pittsburgh. The Vietnam War was kind of wrapping up, but there was still a sense of real mission as the F-4s did touch and gos. We were handed out 1,000s of demerits with threats of marching them off, but after awhile the moron that was handing them out to us gave up. Ron left for USAFA and my brother Kurt and I pursued our black belts #109 and #110. I was accepted to USAFA, to my surprise, but CAP Ranger experience means a lot to the selection committee for leadership. After my first year, Ron and I were on the parachute team together (8 cadets from each class were accepted), then Ron went off to pilot training in 1979, and F-16s at Hill AFB. I graduated from pilot training two years later and went to fly F-15s at Holloman AFB, NM (now home to F-117s). I remember seeing Ron at Hill AFB, UTAH during an accident investigation I attended. The F-16 was brand new and the first fly-by-wire system so they crashed one about every 6 weeks. Though these were sad times for viper pilots, we still nicknamed the jet the "lawn dart." The running joke was that if you wanted to own an F-16, you buy some land in Utah and wait for one to fall out of the sky.

Along the way Ron married Debra, a southern belle he met in pilot training at Columbus Mississippi, and they have 3 children: Dustin, Elizabeth, and Christopher. There were about 2 years apart (now ranging from college graduate to junior in high school). (His youngest son, Christopher, looks exactly like him when Ron was in CAP. . . with the same daredevil attitude: this past winter snow boarded off his house roof some 20 feet to check out the snow depth via a face plant.)

I met up with the family in 1984 on a Red Flag mission in Las Vegas, Nellis AFB. I had taken a weekend off and drove to Edwards AFB to check into attending test pilot school and visit a former flight commander in F-15s (now Colonel Kevin Chilton, and astronaut in charge of the International Space Station program for NASA). Who did I find when I was there? Ron, Deb and three hell raising kids. True to form there was an engine taken apart in the garage, as Ron was reworking something mechanical on his van. At the time I am not sure if he was ballooning, but he later became an expert balloon pilot. In addition to taking on any challenge is a big way, he was an expert ranger, expert sky diver, expert balloon pilot, USAF Command Pilot, test pilot, had his ATP. (Like the comment on Apollo 13 by Jimmy's mom, if anyone could build it, Ron could land it.)

Over the next couple of years, I taught Foreign Military Sales students how to fly the F-5 at Williams AFB, near Phoenix AZ. Ron did his test pilot thing and I, being newly married, decided to get out of the Air Force and work for Oracle Corp. Ron spent a year on a remote tour to Korea leaving Deb and kids in the Nevada desert. When I was working for Sybase, Ron needed a job so I gave him one selling software to the military. The family moved to Colorado and Ron worked for me for two years while flying as a reserve test pilot. Selling was not his thing so he got an apartment in California, and took some of their numerous vehicles in various states of disrepair and his balloon stuff back to the high desert. He lived in Colorado about three miles from me, but would commute to California to fly as a reserve test pilot. Along the way, he did a stint hang gliding (rigid frame), but later really got into paragliding (soft canopy).

He worked for Space Systems on the National Space Plane project, attempted to get an airline job, but was at a low point in airline hiring trends. His latest commercial job was working for a defense contractor on a classified B-1B program. If you get the idea that Ron was a rolling stone, you are right.

That gets us up to date to his disappearance over the high desert one beautiful Saturday afternoon. After flying for the Air Force in the morning, he drove to his launch point about 7 miles west of Edwards AFB, parked and launched from a common site he used. He was alone and many people saw his paraglider.

Three days later after failing to contact him and finding that he had not reported to work, Debra initiated a search. The local sheriff department set up a command center on the ridge above his launch point and conducted ground searches (not grid searches) for two weeks, while CAP flew aerial missions. While he often carried a UHF radio, he mentioned to Debra a few weeks before at a balloon meet that it was not working. He did not appear to have any other type of transponder or radio. His family flew out to California and stayed for 10 days; however, "civilians" were not allowed to search. Kern County Sheriff department was the search coordinator and the search commander grew frustrated as each lead came up empty.

I worked with Space Imaging in Thorton Colorado to provide 1 meter resolution images of the target area; however, these provided no solid leads. I will tell you a story about the Army helping out when we see each other in a couple of weeks.

Have a great week, and feel free to forward me questions.

Al Wallace
#109

Centennial, Colorado