



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Meeting the challenge

Last month, Col. Ross Anderson — my kid — and his staff were among hundreds of U.S. Air Force individuals, groups and civilians who were recognized for meeting the challenges of their tasks as members of our nation's Total Force at the Air Force Association's annual Air Space Cyber Conference held in the Gaylord National Convention Center Washington, D.C.

It was heart-moving, sitting there at the conference—with hundreds of Air Force airmen all around us—witnessing the achievements of 69 men and women, both military and civilian, who were receiving awards for getting the job done for the good of the service, their teammates, themselves and for Mankind.

Each award provided everyone in attendance with a more focused look at how our Air Force accomplishes a lot more than protecting our backsides. One moving example was Air Force nurse Captain Jessica Rameriz from Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. She received the Juanita Redmond Award for developing new ways to help soon-to-be mothers bring their little ones into the world a little more easily and successfully.

Sure, she signed up primarily to heal sick and wounded USAF military personnel, but she went so much further to meet the

challenges of her responsibilities to her military personnel ... and their wives.

As each individual and group came up on the stage to receive their award for their achievements, the announcer provided the audience with a short but concise account of what he/she/they had done to merit the special recognition.

A highlight came when the moderator of the event introduced 101-year old Lt. Col. Richard Cole, last surviving member of the famous 1942 Doolittle Raiders.

Lt. Col. Cole was Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle's co-pilot, who led 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers on the mission to bomb Japan that changed the nation's morale following the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The AFA asked Lt. Col. Cole to give a name to the new USAF stealth bomber, and without hesitation he said, "Raider."

Little did I know, way back in the '60s, when I was staff naturalist for the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) that the old Cub I used for checking golden eagle nests throughout Central Oregon would hook Ross and his older brother, Dean, into becoming F-16 pilots. Neither of them could reach the rudder pedals, but oh my, did they enjoy the actions that followed their pushing and pulling the control stick!

In 1995, Ross got the job of his dreams and started flying the F-16C. He became an F-16 instructor pilot in the 78th Fighter Squadron at Shaw AFB in SC. By 2001 he was the F-16 operations officer for the 302 Fighter Squadron at Luke AFB in AZ, and in 2006 became the 944th operations support flight commander at Luke, and was greeted by his number-two son, Tyler.

Ross has been deployed eight times for combat. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Turkey and



PHOTO COURTESY USAF

Col. Ross Anderson and his staff of the 926th Reserve Air Force Wing receiving the Air Force Association's "Outstanding Reserve Unit Award."

Iraq. Today, it's hard for him to point out one specific deployment as particularly special, though flying over Afghanistan from Kuwait in October 2001 was pretty remarkable. It was during that deployment where he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross.

After returning to the states Ross was sent to Nellis AFB in Nevada, where he took over the newly formed 926th Wing, which distinguished itself by outstanding achievements from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015. During this period, Ross' Wing achieved an unprecedented degree of Total Force Integration within the United States Air Force Warfare Center and Twelfth Air Force.

As the most mission-diverse wing in the Air Force Reserve Command, members

of the 926th engaged in round-the-clock, non-stop remotely piloted aircraft multi-theater combat operations resulting in 178 enemy killed in action; provided integral support for and successful accomplishment of 10 combatant command exercises and more than 40 joint/coalition strikes.

The 926th trained more than 242,000 warfighters worldwide; performed operational testing in air, space and cyberspace domains supporting Air Combat Command and Air Force Space Command; provided all test directors for the entirety of fighter aircraft (A-10, F-15, F-15E, F-16, F-22, F-35) at Nellis Air Force Base, and are the sole cyber operational test organization for

Air Force Space Command.

Finally, the 926th Wing provided the only Air Force Reserve Command pilot for the United States Air Force Aerial Demonstration Squadron (Thunderbirds), as advance pilot and narrator.

As a result of these distinctive accomplishments, the 926th Wing was recognized in Washington, D.C. in front of an audience of their peers, as well as very senior USAF leadership.

Ross has stacked up over 5,500 hours as pilot-in-command (PIC) in the T-37, T-38, F-16 and MQ-9, including over 410 hours of combat time. He'll be the first to tell you, he's the luckiest man in the world.

In his words, "It's been a wonderful and wild ride."

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