

Craig and Deb Grabeel

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After her VC-8 'Redtail' squadron tour Deb received orders to the EUCOM HQ staff in Stuttgart, where I visited her for Oktoberfest and side trips to Paris, Amsterdam, and Garmisch in the Bavarian Alps. After completing our active duty commitments we relocated to Palm Beach County, FL, married, and enjoyed careers as drilling naval reservists. During those years we raised two sons and became very active in church and volunteer work—especially Boy Scouts—with both boys achieving Eagle Scout, and Oscar participating in Justin's Eagle 'winging' ceremony as guest of honor.

After completing an extended command tour and retiring from the Naval Reserve in 1992, I accepted a Department of the Navy senior specialist position in support of their Total Quality Leadership implementation program. The DON relocated us to the Norfolk area, and for six years our teams assisted Navy and Marine Corps commands worldwide by conducting TQL Senior Leader Seminars, facilitating associated strategic planning evolutions, and enhancing naval leadership training at our schoolhouses in Little Creek, VA, and Coronado, CA.

Along the way a large international training and consulting firm associated with George Washington University, the Project Management Institute, and the Defense Acquisition University presented another opportunity. So with a Masters Certificate in Project Management from GWU, and a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification from PMI, I took the leap and hung out my shingle as an independent consultant.

And for most of the next fifteen years my road-warrior lifestyle continued in assisting Fortune 50 companies—IBM, Motorola, AT&T, etc.—DOD and other federal & state agencies, and defense-related industries like Newport News Shipbuilding (NNS). Global client and international scouting volunteer engagements over the years included travel to Canada, Iceland, UK, Denmark, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Sicily, Tunisia, Bahrain, Japan and Hawaii.

Also during those years, Deb's Naval Reserve duty focused on assisting the SEAL community, both as a drilling reservist, and later on as a recalled to active duty reserve coordinator for the Special Warfare Group 2 commodore's staff in Little Creek. Also, in addition to supporting SPECWARCOM HQ in Coronado, she led a contingent to stand up a SEAL unit in Rota, Spain. She may well be the only female Chief Yeoman to receive an 'Honorary Frogman' certificate signed by a former 'Bull Frog' SEAL and 4-star Admiral.

Deb completed her undergraduate degree and, once our boys were of school age, chose to resume her career. And since retiring from the reserves in 2000, she has been a key player with a small defense contractor that was selected to oversee NAVSEA's nuclear carrier refueling and complex overhaul

(RCOH) program at NNS. Her plan is to retire in a couple of years and devote more time to quilting and enjoying our 2-year and 4-month old grandsons.

The only hi-performance flying I got to do was with Oscar in the VC-8 T-birds and in a Pitts Special S-2 with an old AOCS classmate. As you may know, we Sea King bubbas affectionately called the H-3 a “shufflin’ shitcan” for good reason...underpowered, torque-limited, top-heavy, and leaked hydraulic fluid like a sieve, it’s a wonder they performed like they did.

Since Roosy I got to sail periodically with Steve Carey in Tradewind, and later—after she was trashed in a hurricane—in CILCIA (Changes in Latitudes...you know the rest), mostly out of P’cola marina until he passed a couple years ago from COVID. And I hunted deer & turkey with Oscar on Sarah’s family’s farm for several years. Other than that and a few visits and occasional emails with Bookie, I kinda lost touch with most of the Redtail gang.

But I was very fortunate to have barely survived heart failure and open-heart surgery six years ago—one if the lucky ones, statistically—largely due to having “an athlete’s heart”, as my surgeon told Deb. Guess all those ‘young and stupid’ decades of playing rugby football paid off!

In the meantime, we divide our time between our home in Virginia Beach and our apartment at an active living community of mostly senior military retirees in Williamsburg called Patriots Colony.

Of course our walls are decorated with pictures from our wonderful tours in PR...cruising the Virgin Islands in the good sloop *Avignon*, fun regattas racing with *PEGANSUNAN* and the other Roosy Roads marina denizens, and especially the SAR/MEDEVAC missions that were some of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.

Redtails (and Rotorheads) Forever!

Craig

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