

I'm afraid I will lack the composure of Ana and Morgan, you two girls did great. So I think it best to start with some humor. When Pop and I talked about his memorial service and I told him I suspected a couple of VA-12 pilots would be there, he told me to tell them those sons of bitches need to buy the beer for all the bets they lost while in the squadron. Pilots bet on everything – bombing scores, landing grades, timing, etc.

First and foremost, on behalf of my Mother and Sister and the rest of our family, I'd like to thank you all for coming out and supporting us as we pay tribute to a most remarkable man. I'd like to provide some background so you can know a little more about who Walt Petersen was and what made him tick.

Pop was born in Dundee, New York, a small town in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. He was the fifth of six children born to Carl and Vera Petersen. His mother was a schoolteacher for a period of time. She enjoyed crocheting, caning chairs, and maintained the family tree which traced the family's genealogy back to the 1600s.

His father emigrated from Hjørring Denmark to the US in 1906 and later enlisted in the Army and served in France during World War I as a field artillery sergeant. Upon his return to the United States he settled down to

become a farmer, raising crops and livestock. The flag you see displayed on the easel is the flag Grandpa Pete had draped over his casket when he was buried in 1965. And after 50 years being folded in a triangle we worried it would not survive the ceremony at Barrancas if it were opened up and placed on his casket. But it was important to Pop that his Dad's flag be included in this service as it represents a lineage of military service that began in 1917 – ninety-nine years ago. A legacy of service that continues today.

So it's very evident that Pop was a product of his parents – solid Scandinavian work ethic, love of the outdoors, aware of the importance of community service, and one who enjoyed crafts, history, and learning.

Pop was an Eagle Scout – a story was told by his sister that one of the last merit badges he needed was the camping merit badge. To earn that badge the scout needed to attend a long-term campout lasting at least six days.

But his family could not afford to send him to summer camp, both for the cost as well as the loss of someone who had daily chores on the farm. His scoutmaster offered that he could satisfy the requirement by camping in his own backyard for an extended period of time. So one summer he pitched his tent and started camping out in his yard. Some buddies joined him, and apparently a challenge was made to see who could camp out the longest.

Eventually Pop purchased a surplus Army tent, cot, and sleeping bag, and won the bet by spending more than a year camped out in a tent in upstate New York with his dog. Every. Single. Night. I'm not sure if that attests to his hardiness, his tenacity, or his stubbornness. Clearly times were different back then. Today, his Mom would have been arrested by social services for child endangerment. And I feel really badly for the dog.

One of his favorite aviation stories he liked to tell was flying a ten hour low-level in the *Skyraider* from Jacksonville to San Diego, launching at dawn and chasing the sun to land in time for happy hour, following highway 90, and never climbing above 100 feet. He would talk about having the canopy open, white scarf flowing in the breeze, while eating a box lunch and tossing the chicken bones and other food scraps over the side. I've often wondered what people thought when they stepped outside to find orange peels in their yard.

One day I asked Pop when it was that he decided he wanted to fly. He said it was early in high school and he was riding his bike to deliver eggs to a customer and saw a guy land a biplane at a nearby grass strip. Pop pedaled over, introduced himself, and asked the pilot how much a ride cost. The answer was "how much have you got?" Pop replied "50 cents," to which the pilot informed him that 50 cents was exactly how much an

airplane ride cost. The flight lasted all of about three minutes, just enough time to take off, turn downwind, and land.

I share that story as it speaks volumes about not being afraid to try new things. But it also reminds me how important chance encounters and the kindness of strangers can be. In this case it set our Dad on a lifetime of adventure and serendipitous meetings with people like you. Later this afternoon at the Reception, we'd love to hear your own stories of how you met Pop or your favorite recollection of him.

Commander Brooks provided insight on what it was like to work for and fly with Pop. A recurring theme many of you shared with me during the past few days was that to my father, the phrase "an Officer and a Gentleman" wasn't just a catchy recruiting slogan. It was the way he conducted himself, in and out of uniform. During my own military and civilian careers I have always tried to emulate Pop in how I handled myself as a leader – be a positive role model, lead from the front and take care of the troops...something akin to ethical leadership. I can't say I always succeeded, but it was and remains a worthwhile pursuit. One of his traits I always admired was his ability to remain unflappable, regardless of the situation. A favorite comment of his when involved on the receiving end of

an argument, be it foreign or domestic, was to say “this is nothing...I’ve taken real flak before.”

Pop was one of the few men I’ve ever known who looked as comfortable in a tuxedo as he did in a pair of dirty overalls, or scuba gear, or a flight suit, or some outlandish costume for a party. While I’m pretty sure he’d rather be flying or shoveling horse manure than spending time on the cocktail circuit, he was equally adept at both ends of the spectrum.

He was a handyman. Not quite a MacGyver, but he taught himself a variety of skills – how to repair things, how to reupholster furniture, and he even taught himself how to sew. For Ana and Morgan, remember this was a time before videos and the intranet – no telling what he could have done if that technology existed fifty years earlier. But it was a running joke in our house that whatever the time estimate was for a project, you multiplied it by a factor of at least three to get an accurate guess for how long it would really take.

Some other recollections from friends and family: Pop taught my friend Robert how to tie his shoes. He taught his grandchildren and me how to fish. He taught Becky how to love and care for animals, although they might have taken that one a bit too far. In the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan,

Pop found a baby squirrel and bottle fed it and d a nest box on the screened in porch. But after a while it started to trash the porch, so the decision was made to take the squirrel to the wildlife rescue, where the lady scolded Pop for keeping a wild animal more than 24 hours. Grudgingly she finally had to admit the squirrel was in better shape due to Pop's care than if they had taken care of it themselves. He and my Mother both taught multiple generations of family and friends how to entertain with style. He taught hundreds of naval aviators how to fly and fight - as an instructor pilot, a commanding officer, and as a simulator instructor.

He taught me that there is intrinsic goodness in everyone, and that life is far more enjoyable as an optimist than as a pessimist. He taught me how to be an engaged father, and he was most certainly an engaged grandfather as he illustrated by spending five months taking care of our young children while I was deployed and Amy was in training.

He proposed to his wife by saying "Marry me Baby, and I'll show you the world." And he held true to that promise for over 54 years, in places like England, Guam, Okinawa, Panama, Belize, and a dozen of other countries around the globe.

The last few years were not kind to my Father, but there were sparks of his former personality that managed to periodically escape the prison of his mind. He was always at his best when enjoying a cold beer, or an ice cream, or up on the flight line at NAS Whiting watching student naval aviators learn their profession, where he would critique the interval between the formation students as they arrived overhead for the break. During those times he knew exactly where he was and what was going on. One of the most powerful of these moments occurred at Austin's winging, when an 82-year old Alzheimer's victim stood tall with his hand over his heart and sang the National Anthem before pinning his own wings of gold on his grandson's uniform.

So how do you say goodbye to the man who had the most impact in your life? The good news, for me at least, is that I don't have to say goodbye, as I have so many tangible reminders of him in my daily life – I can eat my cereal out of a bowl he made with his bare hands, I can admire the piece of furniture in our living room he refinished for us. But most importantly, I can see his spirit...his love of life...as it manifests itself in our two children, Austin and Audrey, who chose to follow in his footsteps and serve our nation as Naval Aviators. They are his legacy, and his enduring gift to the world.

My father was not a religious man. But he was a spiritual being. Which is why we've included the two quotes that appear on the front and back of the program. The one on the front was written in his own hand just a few years ago and tucked away among his personal items. And while I disagree with the notion that one must go through life alone, I think it speaks to his belief that the individual controls their own destiny.

The quote on the back is one I have always taken solace in and shared with friends who have suffered the loss of a friend or family member.

Walt Petersen is all of those things in that poem, but I especially find comfort in knowing he is one of those stars that shine brightly at night as he continues to guide me.

And finally, as I look over this diverse crowd of friends, I realize how important it is these days to foster more friendships that cross artificial boundaries.

Thank you.