Edward "Whitey" Feightner, the Grim Reaper Ace
Volume 34, No.3 / 2017

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Rear Admiral Edward L. Feightner in 1970. (U.S. Navy)
Meeting with Colonel Clarence "Bud" Anderson
By: Ellen Jetland

I have a huge passion for World War II and aviation history. While working at the Museum of Flight, I often spend my breaks in the Personal Courage Wing where I discovered the American Fighter Aces exhibit. I was fascinated by the stories of amazing aviators and their skills, honor, and dedication to their country. I dreamed one day of meeting an American Fighter Ace because it would be such an honor to meet a master of the skies, as there are very few left alive.

As luck would have it, my dear friend Chuck Kluenker from University of North Dakota, reached out to me about an ace he knew; a triple ace in fact, Colonel Clarence "Bud" Anderson as they had crossed paths in California and Oshkosh. Before Col. Anderson agreed to the meeting, he wanted me to forward him some essays I wrote about aviation military history and other relevant material that described who I am and the work I do. So I forward my previous essay applications for the AFAA scholarship, resume, and some photos from when I met Bob Hoover, worked with the Blue Angels, and did World War II reenacting. Luckily, after Bud read the materials, it was a go! We scheduled the meeting when I would be home for spring break in March.

In preparation for the meeting, I did more research about him. With the help of Chuck, I watched a documentary, read "To Fly and Fight", and went to The Museum of Flight archives to gather information. The stories and biographies about Col. Anderson continued to amaze me. For example, it blows my mind that he was not shot once by enemy aircraft during aerial combat and yet was able to shoot down 16 ¼ aircraft during World War Two!

The day I met Col. Anderson, I flew from Seattle to Sacramento early in the morning. Chuck picked me up from the airport and we drove to Auburn Airport where he gave me a tour around. It was such a beautiful airport. I can see how pilots like Col. Anderson liked coming here. Right before we were meeting with Col. Anderson, we stopped by Sunshine Flyers. Inside, Chuck introduced me to Tammy Meredith of The Placer Golden 99s. She presented me with an envelope of funds donated by her organization, Chuck, Mike Duncan (owner of Sunshine Flyers), Wayne Mooneyham, and Don Wolfe to cover my trip and lunch with Col. Anderson! My jaw dropped to the ground; I was so surprised. They were so excited that a young lady like me was going to meet with a special ace and wanted to contribute. Their generosity made this trip even more special, which I cannot thank them enough for.

Chuck and I went back to the Auburn Airport to have lunch at Col. Anderson's favorite restaurant, Wing Grill and Expresso Bar. When Col. Anderson arrived, I walked up to his car to greet him and his daughter. He chose me to escort him to the restaurant, and I thought, "Oh my gosh, I am holding onto a fighter ace!" After we sat down at our table outside in the beautiful sun, Col. Anderson asked me to tell him about myself. It was really humbling to hear that he was so interested to learn about me rather than talking about himself. Through our conversation, we also talked about aviation, our flight training experience, getting over motion sickness while flying, about my University, the future, and life in general. Not only did we have lunch, but then we went to a hangar that was dedicated to Col. Anderson. Lastly, we went to tour the Douglas Van Howd studio where the life size bronze statue of Col. Anderson was made, which is displayed at the Auburn Airport. As our time together ended, he signed and gave me one of his challenge coins and a copy of his book "To Fly and Fight" which I will forever cherish.

Meeting with Col. Anderson was truly a once in a lifetime experience. I can't tell you how much of honor it was to meet such a humble, grateful aviator. Getting the chance to meet him in person allowed me to see Col. Anderson not only as a fighter ace but also as a human being who puts others before himself. He dedicated his life to the service for our country from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and beyond, which should not be forgotten.

Ever since meeting with Col. Anderson, I often think of ways to preserve his honor so others can learn about him and he will not be forgotten. With that being said, it has inspired me to start a fundraising project to raise money to put Colonel Anderson in the Hall of Honor in the Personal Courage Wing at The Museum of Flight, in recognition for his service to our freedom and country so he can be forever remembered.