The United States Air Force Academy remembers 1LT Larry Adams

Larry Adams with his F105D. Submitted

By Dennis Miner, Special to The Willits News

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A USAF Colonel giving the folded flag to Lt. Adam's brother during a ceremony held in 2005 when they finally brought home Lt. Adam's remains. Submitted

Fifty years ago, on April 19, 1966, First Lieutenant Lee (Larry) Adams crashed in North Vietnam. He was the pilot of a Republic F-105D Thunderchief, (commonly referred to as “The Thud” by pilots and ground crew). He was listed as Missing in Action until his remains were discovered, identified through DNA analysis, and returned to his family in Willits, in 2005.

Lt. Adams got his private pilot’s license while attending Willits Union High School, where he was a star 6-foot-4 football player. After high school, he attended Santa Rosa Junior College where he was Captain of the football team, participating on the 2nd All-Conference Team as a Tackle in 1958. He graduated with an Associate Degree in Aeronautics in 1959. Afterwards, he was accepted to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado and began attending in 1960. After making the Commandant’s List five times, he graduated in the Class of 1963 as an Officer in the United States Air Force.

Today, as newly arriving cadets enter the North Gate of the Air Force Academy, there is an intimidating B-52 Bomber with a wingspan of 185 feet on display. The bomber was in service during the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War was the first war that Academy graduates would get the nation’s call to serve in, to include Lt .Adams.

It’s Sunday and singing and music is heard coming from the distinctive Cadet Chapel as cadets worship. The chapel overlooks the Cadet Area and Honor Court where various fighter aircraft are on display. Visitors are informed; “The U.S. Air Force Academy is one of the nation’s finest four-year institutions of higher learning. The academic curriculum provides cadets with a solid foundation appropriate to an Air Force career and the activities of a responsible American citizen.”

One of the very first things each new cadet class does after parting with their families and before they begin their journey is pay respects to the graduates who have gone on before, near Doolittle Hall. Here is where the

Memorial Wall is located and the Southeast Asia Pavilion. The name 1LT L. A. Adams Class of ‘63 is etched on the Memorial Wall. Inside the pavilion, there is a bronze plaque donated by his classmates with his name. There is also a memorial dedicated to Vietnam War prisoners of war. In the Plaza of Heroes there are bronze plaques depicting medals for bravery awarded in the Vietnam War, of which 1LT Adams received three: the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Purple Heart and the Air Medal, (five times).

With each new class of student cadets at the Air Force Academy, the memory of 1LT Larry Adam’s service and sacrifice is remembered with the historical lineage of the “Long Blue Line.” This Memorial Day please visit the Mendocino County Fallen Vietnam War Veterans Memorial next to the museum where 1LT Larry Adams is honored.

Dennis Miner grew up in Willits and graduated from Willits High School with the Class of 1969. He had a career in the US Army and retired as Major Miner. He recently visited the Air Force Academy, in Colorado Springs, Colo. where he retired.