

ORANGE & BLACK

VOL 2009 WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF '54 MEMORIES; SIOUX FALLS, SD NO 2

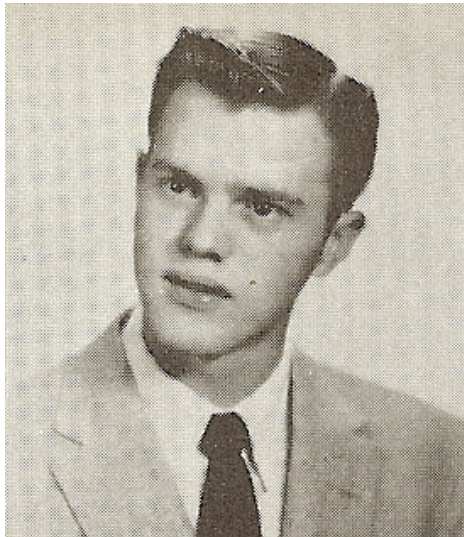
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Your Photos & Stories are both Requested and Encouraged. Send to Jack Phillips: jackmp@me.com

SPECIAL MEMORIAL DAY EDITION



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DON KNUTSON

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Each year when our great country celebrates Memorial Day my American pride always wells up inside as I am sure it does with each of you. Since it is a National

Holiday set aside to honor the brave heroes of our military service I thought it appropriate to recirculate a tribute to Donald O. Knutson which I wrote 4 years ago. My address list for the Class of '54 has more than doubled since I wrote this tribute so I am sure many of you are unaware of what a true American hero Don is and of his highly decorated and heroic military career.

I first learned of Don's incredible acts of bravery at our 50th reunion, but the thought of his heroism stayed with me long after I returned home. The more I thought about the very real and terrifying dangers Don faced and endured for all of us, the more I felt his story should be shared with all of you. I finally called Don to ask his permission to let me share with you some of the unbelievable stories of his

duty in Viet Nam as a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force.

I am in possession of a copy of the biography the United States Air Force has prepared on Colonel Donald O. Knutson. It is indeed an impressive document. And yes, it even includes Don graduating from Washington High School.

When Don graduated from pilot training school as a

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LOTS OF FREE CUSTOM
MUSIC CDS TO BE GIVEN
AWAY AT REUNION

In addition to winning a custom made music CD for guessing who this month's mystery baby is, I will be giving every classmate attending our 55th reunion a free music CD of the most popular hits from 1950 to 1954 .

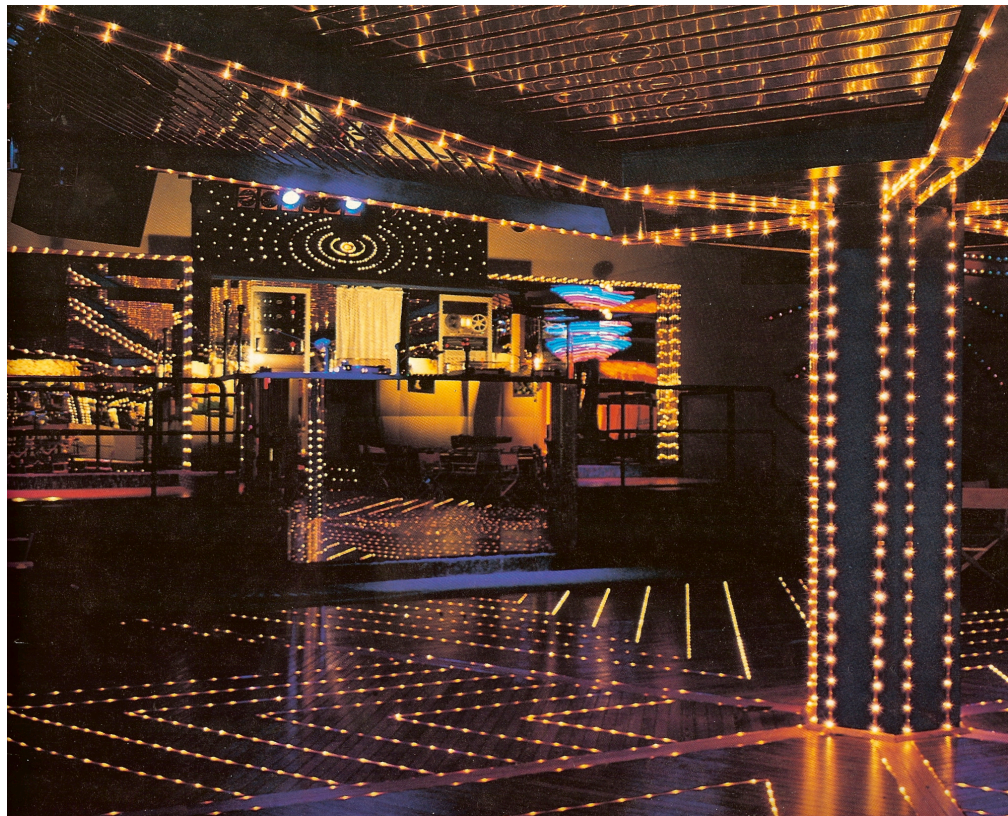
As most of you know, for 33 years I have owned a very large nightclub in Modesto, CA that holds 1,450 people. It is called "Crocodiles". (See photo at right), and my son, Guy, has now very ably run the club for the past 15 years.

All of the music for your free CDs as well as the Sat. night reunion dance will come from our well over 100,000 song library.

Lots of other CDs will be award as prizes at the reunion for things such as trivia questions.

About 6 weeks ago when it was announced that I was going to be providing the recorded dance music for the Saturday night reunion dance, I asked for music requests and suggestions for the evening. Only two classmates, Jane Winnett and Kay Otten Roman, responded to that request,. For their help they have each won a free CD. (That is providing they are present at the reunion. Since the purpose of giving the free CDs is to encourage attendance to the reunion, all recipients of free CDs must be in attendance.)

Even though you won't win a free CD, I would still appreciate your music suggestions.



This fun group below gathered at Kent and Judy Morstad's home the night before our 30th reunion in 1984. l. to r. Bud Olson, Helen Eggers Olson (deceased), Don Erickson, Tom Howes (WHS class of '53), Kent Morstad, Joyce McFarland Howes, Marilyn Hill Viehweg, Marilyn Ronken, Judy Erickson and seated Dick Ronken.



Knutson continued from page 1.
cadet and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force he was just 20 years old and at the time was the youngest jet fighter pilot and second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

Here are a few of the highlights from that bio that I think deserve special mention. Don flew 394 combat missions over Laos and Vietnam. 394 is a staggering number of combat missions for one man to fly. He was shot down behind enemy lines on two of those missions and no doubt survived because of his excellent training, his own tough tenacity and the grace of God. The Vietcong searched for him all night so dangerously close he could hear them talking and walking within feet of where he was hiding.

In counting the ribbons and medals referred to in his bio

I count 34 medals plus numerous other awards. He has logged over 5,200 hours of military flying.

Try to imagine this frightening scenario. It was very late afternoon, just about dusk. Don had just completed a bombing run somewhere over North Vietnam. He was just starting to pull up out of the run at 350 miles an hour and at an altitude of about 800 feet when his plane was hit by enemy fire.

He was over a thick jungle, deep behind enemy lines and was forced to bail out. He knew Vietcong patrols would be rapidly converging on his location in search of him. Sure enough, he heard them coming almost immediately but was able to find a temporary hiding place. Through out the night they were close enough that he worried they would hear his heart pounding. It was now dark

and he knew there was no chance of a rescue until the next morning. He was forced to continually move from one hiding place to another through out the night to avoid being found. It had to be the longest night ever for anyone.

The other members of his squadron had circled while his parachute descended and recorded his exact location. He knew rescue helicopters would arrive at first light. He just had to stay alive and avoid capture through the night.

American helicopters did arrive the next morning and Don, using a mirror, was able to signal them his location. Under heavy enemy fire one of the helicopters was able to come in for the pickup. The rescue helicopter was under such heavy fire, they couldn't even wait to reel Don in. As soon as he was in the rescue sling, the

TWO DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSSES

In addition to Don's 34 medals and numerous other awards he has also been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice. The Air Force wording on the 2 Distinguished Flying Cross citations are as follows:

"Captain Donald O. Knutson distinguished himself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as a Forward Air Controller directing fighter aircraft in the Tally-Ho operational area in Southeast Asia on 3 November 1966. On that date, Captain Knutson was flying his O1E Bird Dog aircraft over a very hostile environment when he located trenches, bunkers, North Vietnamese troops and active gun positions. Disregarding his own safety, he exposed himself to draw the hostile ground fire away from the fighters, enabling them to direct their fire on the hostile gun positions. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Captain Knutson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

"Captain Donald O. Knutson distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a Forward Air Controller over Southeast Asia from 29 December 1966 to 10 February 1967. During this period, Captain Knutson directed fighter aircraft against numerous gun emplacements including 37mm and quad 50 caliber positions. Despite intense automatic weapons fire directed at his aircraft, he repeatedly marked the gun positions and skillfully controlled the fighters onto the target. Demonstrating complete disregard for his own personal safety, Captain Knutson was directly responsible for the destruction of 15 gun positions. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Knutson reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force."

helicopter elevated just enough for Don to clear the tree tops and took off with him swinging like a puppet on a string far below the helicopter to a safe landing.

The other time Don was shot down his plane was disabled by ground fire. This time by flying just above the tree line and slowing his speed to 50 knots, which is stall speed, his plane fell/crashed into the top of a thick grove of tall trees where it came to a crashing halt entangled in the tree tops.



Don, the last time he visited Jack in Las Vegas. l. to r. Debra Davey (Jack's girlfriend), Don and Don's girlfriend, Khin. (Khin is from Southern California.)

Again, he knew the enemy would be there very quickly so he hurriedly scrambled out of his precariously dangling plane that is hanging in the tree tops 60 feet above the ground and shimmies down the trees, injuring his shoulder in the process. But this time there was enough daylight left that rescue helicopters were able to pick him up within a relatively short time.

In addition to the two Distinguished Flying Crosses and the 34 medals, Don received one other extremely high and special honor that should be noted. In 1981 he was awarded the "Order of the Rising Sun" medal by the Emperor of Japan. It is the Japanese government's second highest award.

I hope you are as moved and as impressed as I am with the Don Knutson story. I can't imagine anyone not sharing my feelings that Don Knutson is truly a very special man, an extremely courageous American and a super patriot that freedom loving men and women all over the world owe such a huge and totally unpayable debt of gratitude. I wish I could share his story with the entire world!

I have always had the greatest respect and admiration for our elders, the members of "The Greatest Generation" that Tom Brokaw has so grandly written about, but I don't think

any of them had anything over our own Donald O. Knutson from Washington High School class of 1954 in Sioux Falls, SD,

I would like to end this story on Don with a bit of humor. Just last year, in 2008, Don and an Air Force buddy took an 11 day Caribbean cruise together and on the two formal nights chose to wear their Air Force dress uniforms. (See Photo below.)

Because Don was the much more decorated officer of the two, he had the unpleasant task all of both evenings of having to fight ladies off that continued to mistake him for the ship's Captain.



Don Knutson in his dress Air Force uniform was repeatedly mistaken by single ladies as the Ship's Captain, but he managed to suffer thru both nights.

End of Don Knutson story.

The only person that knew who our mystery lady was from last issue was the lady herself, Lois Rossow Gellerman. The picture appeared in the Homecoming addition of The Orange & Black when baby pictures were run of all the royalty. See the resemblance?



Lois Rossow Gellerman

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2012 LONDON OLYMPICS

In case any of you are interested in volunteering to work at the London Olympics, you can learn more on line at "London Olympics Jobs". The dates are 7-27-12 to 8-12-12.

I have signed up to work and thought some of you might also be interested. I am concerned about being older than they would like, but they have responded to my application and did not say I was too old, so maybe they have jobs for people our age. It most certainly would be a great experience.

GUESS WHO AGAIN?

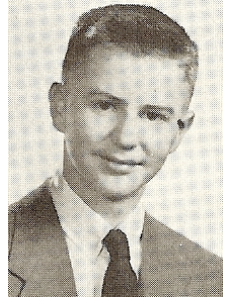
Okay, now you have a hint. Actually two hints. First person identifying the photo below will win a music CD made especially for them. Winner must be present at our 55th reunion to collect CD.



"Always musical--doing the bunny hop"

Inset photo; Gary with son, Terry and daughter, Suzanne.

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Gary recently sent me the following letter and photos of an April plane trip he and his son, Terry shared. Thanks Gary.

"On April 30th, son Terry flew a newly painted T34B Mentor from the Monterey Navy Flying Club to Montgomery Field, San Diego. The next day the both of us flew to Gillespie Field, El Cajon, to meet up with another pair of T34's so we could all fly to Palm Springs for the Fly-In there May 1-3.
Gar



45 Lost Classmates.

As of 5-27-09

Donald Amundson,
Janice Becker,
Evelyn Benson,
Robert Brown,
Merlyn Christensen,
Shirley Daggitt Blake,
Vonice Dobson McDougal,
Roberta Du Bray McQuinn
Richard Engel
Marvin Fara
John Frederickson,
Maxine Frost,
Lyonel Gonyo,
Alan E. Gruhlke
Karen Gulbranson,
Sharon Gunderson Anderson
Marilyn Joy Hansen,
Joyce Hartson Hardegger
Janyce Howlett,
Shirley Hughes Picek,
Violet Inglis Haraldson
Carolyn Johnson,
Judith Jones Gores,

Jerald Karstens,
Evelyn Larson,
Paul Lindberg,
Christia B. Lueck,
Mary Maxwell Warren,
Carol M. McLimans,
Mary Betty Miracle Hiller,
Betty Nelson Jacobson,
Roger Neubert,
Cynthia Nold,
Lavonne Omer Stockstad
John David Palmer
Joan M. Parker McBride
Frank A. Peck,
Jack Robson,
Ron Salem
Kenneth E. Slobe
Barbara Story,
Betty J. Vissia Petruno,
Donna R. Watne Webster
James L. Watson
Robert A. Young

Here is the most current list of "Lost Classmates". Just two months ago we were missing contact information on close to 100 classmates. Now it is down to just 45 that are still lost. Thanks so much to Glenn Gulbranson for all of his help over the last couple of weeks finding several of our lost friends. He has really done a great job.

As a "JUNE SPECIAL", I will make a free music CD, with your choice of songs, for any one who in June locates one or more of the people on the above "Lost" list. Your help is so important I will even disregard the rule of you having to attend our 55th reunion for this CD. I will happily mail it to you.

AND PLEASE SEND ME YOUR STORIES AND PHOTOS FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER.