RADM Charles Hunter, USN (Ret) Passes

Description

Rear Admiral Charles Bryan Hunter, USN (Ret)

RADM Charles Hunter passed away 2/24/2017. Memorial service will be held at 1 PM March 4th, 2017 At the Gross Funeral Home, 6636 Central Ave, St Petersburg, FL.

I made a post back in 2009 about ADM Hunter here, and what follows is a little more about this man, one of my friends.

I met Charlie (he told us to not call him â€œAdmiralâ€• or stand when he walked in all these years â€“ but we ignored his request out of respect) in 2009 by being invited to have breakfast with several veterans, mostly Naval Academy graduates and pilots (he was a 1954 USNA Graduate). Even with a

table full of veterans, not a lot of details of real combat gets mentioned, but from a man who was awarded a Navy Cross, and as noted in the picture, the Distinguished Flying Cross as well, over the years, I heard him speak briefing of his single plane mission into Haiphong Harbor on the moonless night of October 30th, 1967.

He had arrived aboard USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64) to replace the VA-196 CO that had been shot down. His orders to replace were delivered to him one morning at NAS Whidby Island, where he was a Replacement Air Group instructor for the A-6 Intruders. He had gone to work for a normal day, commenting he regularly he and his Bombadier/Navigator (BN) walked into the COâ€™s office and indicated they wanted to get in the game. They were regularly told to shut up, get back to work training crewsâ€¦.but on this particular morning, they were called in and told to gear up for a TransPac flight and get headed west. Arriving aboard, he was now the new CO of VA-196.

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Three months later he was flying up the Red River at night at 200 ft, inbound to the target. I didnâ€™t catch the entire telling, as several conversations are always going around the table, but I overheard â€œThere were 5 SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) coming at us, 2 from (???) and three at 2 oâ€™clock, so I barrel rolled to evade. The we set the radar altimeter to 50 ft and it alarmed 3 times before we got to the target.â€•

Consider that statement for a moment, and parse out the important real details. First off: 5 SAMs headed your way all at once. Youâ€™re low, altitude gives options when playing the physics of flight. Not much of it limits you. Now, heâ€™s inbound and we know his 9.5 tons (a fully loaded A-6 capacity) was delivered to to the location of the mission. While Iâ€™m not a pilot, I know this: Even fighters, let alone attack aircraft, almost always jettison their external stores when itâ€™s time to fight, or in this case, evade. He barrel rolled beginning at 200 ft with 9.5 tons of ordnance still on his wings, and didnâ€™t end up impacting the Red River surface doing close to Mach.

Iâ€™m also not sure of the details in the radar altimeter alarming, but I suspect it was to alert the pilot of an all-weather attack aircraft, designed to fly to target in basically zero visility, that he was going lower than the parameters set into the system to aid the low visibility capabilities. So there he and his BN were, zorching (tip o the hat to the long departed Neptunus Lex â€“ another fine aviator) towards his assignment just short of 600 kts at 50 ft off the water with a now alerted air defense network, at that time, the best one on the planetâ€¦. He popped up, delivered the ordnance, and high taled it back to the CONNIE, with he and his BN intact.

His comment was the USAF airborne asset counted at least 22 SAMs being fired at his aircraft. 22â€¦.let that sink in. Other than that one snippet I overheard and then listen intently for the rest after I heard it begin, he never really mentioned it. He never mentioned his Navy Cross, and until finding his picture (above) on the funeral home site, I had no idea he had a Silver Star as well. Humble. Just a good old boy from the Panhandle of Florida, who worked hard, having many times mentioned his teacher who made a point to make several of them very good in math, and was accepted into the Naval Academy.

More details I managed to collect: He was Commanding Officer of VA-85 (Assuming command 9/6/1968), an East Coast Squadron, and while in that position, I found a passing note on the web years ago about GEN Curtis LeMay coming to the carrier he was flying from, and Charley briefed him. I did ask him ,having found that bit of history, what that was like. He brushed it off like â€œhe was just an average guyâ€• (meaning GEN LeMay). UPDATED: I just found this clip of him, with Gen LeMay in the pilotâ€™s seat of an A-6A, giving his the details of one of his VA-85 aircraft:

He skippered the USS SARATOGA (CV-60) 11-Sep-76 to 4-Feb-78 and had the highest operational performance rates for all the East Coast CVs.

Besides being good company at breakfasts every other Saturday mornings for the last 7+ years, he was just an average guy in being around everyone. No need for special treatment and seemed a little embarrassed by our rank recognition when he or we walked in to our meeting place.

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After absorbing the stories of a great man and leader above, to see him physically, youâ€™d not then a bantam weight 5â€² 6â€³ man could have been a warrior who would have earned top awards for heroism under fire. No matter, he had whet it took when the time came to get the mission accomplished, and also to lead crews to excellence.

Other personal stories: As an Ensign, he began at the RAG learning to fly the F-7U CUTLASS. One of our other breakfast attendees flew with him and later did a deployment to the Med as roommates flying them.

He punched out once: He was getting a mid-air refueling and he ended up with fuel in his A-4 SKYHAWK engine (and not inside the combustion system), causing the plane to begin burning up. Smoke in the cockpit stuff, so he fell back from the tanker and used the ejection seat, without noting any injuries.

Thereâ€™s more to this story about ADM Hunter: The mission of such historical value was the basis for the movie starring Danny Glover: â€œFlight of the Intruder.â€• The differences: It wasnâ€™t a rogue mission and he wasnâ€™t shot down over enemy territory. In this case, Hollywood partially modeled real life.

Full text of his 30 Oct 1967 Mission Citation:

Hunter, Charles Bryan

Commander, U.S. Navy
Attack Squadron ONE HUNDRED NINETY SIX (VA-196), U.S.S. Constellation (CVA-64)
Date of Action: 30 October 1967

Citation:
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander [then Lieutenant Commander] Charles Bryan Hunter (NSN: 0-584531), United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism on 30 October 1967 as a pilot in Attack Squadron ONE HUNDRED NINETY-SIX (VA-196), embarked in U.S.S. CONSTELLATION (CVA-64). Exercising exceptional professional skill and sound judgment, Commander Hunter, planned and executed an extremely dangerous, single-plane, night, radar bombing attack on the strategically located and heavily defended Hanoi railroad ferry slip in North Vietnam. Although the entire Hanoi defensive effort was concentrated upon his lone bomber, he flawlessly piloted his aircraft to the target area and commenced his attack. Seconds before bomb release, six enemy surface-to-air missiles were observed to be tracking on his plane. Undaunted by this threat to his personal safety, Commander Hunter took swift and effective action to avoid the missiles and then proceeded to complete his attack, releasing all weapons in the target area with extreme accuracy. After release, he guided his plane through the intense anti-aircraft-artillery fire and four additional missiles which were fired at his aircraft. In spite of this intense enemy opposition, Commander Hunter completed his mission and was directly responsible for dealing a significant blow to the North Vietnamese logistics efforts. His indomitable perseverance and conspicuous gallantry were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

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Fair winds and following seas, ADM Hunter.

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Tags

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2. carrier based aviation
3. charles hunter
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