



It is a real treat this month to feature the life adventures after high school of Russell Keeling. I was in Senior Chorus with Russell and can vouch that he has a very good singing voice. If you will remember, he was our "Tin Man" in the Operetta, **The Wizard of Oz**. And, he was our representative to All State Chorus. After 59 years, Russ is still singing on a regular basis.

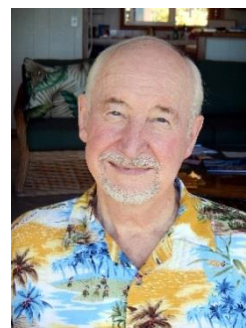
Russ attended our very first reunion in 1975, and I hope will attend our next reunion in 2020. He has been most accomplished in his career; however, anyone who knows Russ would expect nothing less than success from him. He was elected one of our class favorites in high school but little did we know that we would have our very own "Tom Cruise Top Gun" as a classmate!

Russ, although modest and quiet, still lives life as full and fast as he has flown his airplanes. He calls California home; therefore, we hardly ever get to see him unless we are so lucky to get a picture or two while he is on a trip. Now, fasten your seatbelts while you take a fast ride through the adventures and experiences of one of the nicest men I have ever known.

Russell Keeling



1960



2019

The Wizard of OZ

**l-r Russ Keeling, Malissa Starnes Baugh,
Noah Appleton, Dick Tooker**



LT. COL. RUSSELL L. KEELING
Commanding Officer

After graduating from Waco High School, Russell, who became known as "Russ" in his more mature years, attended Texas A&M, earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering and graduated in 1964. While at A&M, he was a member of the Corps of Cadets all four years, was Commander of First Group Staff, and completed the ROTC flight program at nearby Easterwood airfield. His first licensed solo flight was from Waco to Fort Worth to pick up his high-school sweetheart, Betty Craig, (who was attending TCU) for a "cool" weekend. Can't you just imagine how the other coeds were buzzing about that date! Russ commented on his first flight by saying, **"We barely cleared the power lines just south of the little landing strip in Fort Worth...with Betty's dad looking on, horrified, from the ground."**

Upon graduation from A&M, Russ spent a few months dragging heavy electrical wires through mesquite trees (and around rattlesnakes) in central Texas while under the close supervision of Texas Power and Light Company. He then entered pilot training at Reese AFB in Lubbock and after a challenging and competitive year, graduated "Top Gun" (first in his class.) Russ selected the F-104 Starfighter as his choice of fast-movers and was sent to Test Operations at Eglin AFB, Florida. Some of his responsibilities were to takeoff, fly special supersonic profiles, and land unmanned F-104s for the purpose of testing live air-to-air missile firings. Perhaps the highlight of this tour-of duty was Russ's saving a 15-year-old girl who had been caught in a high surf and rip current off the beach of the Officers Club. For this rescue, Russ received the Airman's Medal for life saving and heroism.



In 1969, with the conflict in Southeast Asia picking up steam, Russ volunteered for a tour in A-1s. Flying out of a base on the Mekong River between Thailand and Laos, he completed 236 combat missions in North Vietnam and Laos. These missions varied from blacked-out night sorties over the Ho Chi Min trail, to ground troop support, to the search and rescue of downed American pilots in the region. Russ's plane was "hit" on three occasions but he managed to keep control of the aircraft and land at friendly locations. After a year of combat, he left SEA as one of the most highly decorated pilots (at that particular time) in the "war".

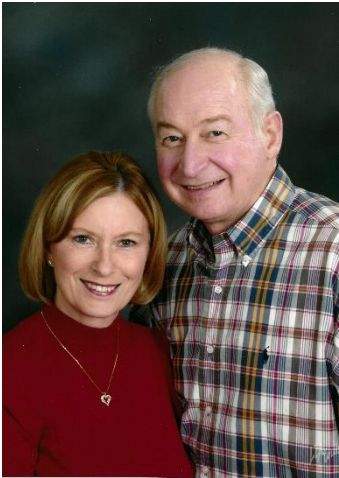
The transition to B-52s was interesting for Russ as he had been a fighter pilot and used to doing everything himself. However, Russ quickly picked up the concept of an "aircrew approach" to combat missions, became an instructor pilot in minimum time, led his crew on numerous nuclear alert periods (ground and flying), and eventually took his Select Crew to Guam and Utapao RTAFB in Thailand. This assignment culminated in daily attacks against Hanoi and Haiphong through the end of conflict. The missions were 15-16 hour sorties, carrying 108 500-lb. bombs, using three-ship mutual-defense cell formations, uploading 100,000 lbs. of fuel during night aerial refueling, and evading the highest concentration of ground-to air-missile defenses in the world. There were several close calls due to the flood of missiles being aimed at Russ, but he received no hits (damage) and had safe RTBs (Return to Base).



After four winters in B-52s at Kincheloe AFB MI (upper peninsula), Russ was sent to the Air Force Institute of Technology where he earned a M.S., Electrical Engineering, then to the Air Force Communications School (Biloxi MS) and then to HQ, Special Communications Command, where he directed the secret testing of unintentional electronic radiation and its uses. This technology which was developed at a secret site on the border between East & West Germany, eventually became the backbone algorithm for the development of "smart bombs", and earned Russ AF-level commendations. Russ said, "**Not bad for an ol' fighter pilot at a pucky desk job!**"

Russ served as Chief of Standardization/Evaluation at the bomb wing at Goldsboro NC for a brief period and then was directed to the operational staff of the Inspector General of the Air Force. His primary duty was to brief the Chief of Staff, USAF, each quarter, on the combat readiness of all forces worldwide. During this period of time, Russ personally developed what became known as Common-Core Inspection Criteria for all units, regardless of command affiliation, responsible for common functions (e.g., Civil Engineer units).

This single effort ensured that all theater commanders could receive units from any other command and know that those forces would be trained and evaluated using common inspection criteria. The significant changes to inspections for every combat unit in the Air Force were immediately implemented by the Chief of Staff, USAF.



Russ retired from the Air Force in 1987 in Redlands CA, where he met his present wife, Lloy (Canadian-born and now a US citizen (and very proud of it)). They married after a six-year courtship, decided to travel, and have been on every continent, with the exception of Antarctica. They have taken many cruises on many different cruise lines and says Russ, **“all were wonderful”**. They especially have enjoyed extensive self-driving trips to (1) Italy/Sicily, (2) Spain, France, and Switzerland, (3) the UK (from Lands’ End to John O’ Groats, (4) Ireland (South & North), and (5) Germany/Austria. Russ says these are **“memorable because of the local friendships cultivated in the locally-owned B&Bs and pubs.”**

When flying on such long trips became boring for them, (age probably had something to do with it) Russ and Lloy turned to “RV-ing”. That decision has helped them to see a lot of the U.S. and Canada which has given them a big change in their

approach to travel.



Post military jobs for Russ include being a financial advisor for military families, C-141 flight training supervisor at Norton AFB, developer of the flight training program for a non-profit air ambulance service, Civil Engineer for the closure of Norton AFB, and training director of the local Sylvan Learning Center. Russ enjoys the activities of racquetball, choral singing (executive positions for the Inland Master Chorale and his church choir), extensive gardening, RV-ing, grandkids (Russ = “Papa”), live entertainment, and several sets of friends.

Wow! What a busy, accomplished and productive life it has been for Russ since Waco High School graduation so many years ago. He has been so many miles, has had so many experiences and close calls, and has displayed so much dedication and determination. It rather reminds me of a few lines by Robert Frost:

**“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to go before I sleep.”**

In closing, Russ says about his life, **“ I’m blessed with the greatest wife and life companion in the world, as well as kids and grandkids, great health, and a good life. ”**

“Cheers and blessings to all my classmates, Russ”.

