

Honoring our POW/MIA in San Antonio

While watching one of the news channels last week, I saw a short report on a POW reunion held in San Antonio, TX, so I did a bit of searching on the web and here is the story as reported on the US Department of Defense website. ON 4 April 2017 members of the 560th Flying Training Squadron (FTS) hosted the 44th annual Freedom Flyer Reunion and 20th annual POW/MIA Symposium on 30-31 March.

The event honored all service members who were prisoners of war or declared missing in action during the Vietnam War, and it included a wreath-laying ceremony and a missing-man-formation flyover. Air Force Col. Joel Carey, wing commander and retired Army Brig. Gen. John Rose, a Vietnam War veteran, were featured as guest speakers during the wreath-laying event at the foot of the base's Missing Man Formation Monument. As quoted in the Department of Defense story: "Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to join us for the celebration in this remembrance of many of those who have come to serve before and sacrificed much," Carey said. The 560th FTS hosted the Pilot Requalification Program for POWs returning to flight status. Their first flight with the squadron was designed to duplicate what each returning pilot's last flight in Southeast Asia would have been like. Traditionally, each pilot was greeted on the flight line to celebrate a successful 100th or end-of-tour mission. Keeping with tradition, the 560th FTS provided each former POW with a long overdue "fini" flight. Since the first such flight on May 21, 1973, the 560th FTS has flown 198 former POWs.

"I cannot begin to tell you how proud I am to be here -- to be a part of this ceremony and remembrance for fellow Vietnam veterans," Rose said. "I remember coming home after 13 months in Vietnam and being met by [a noncommissioned officer] who said, 'Take off your uniform. You're back in the United States. You are not welcomed here,'" Rose said. "It was a painful and tough time. It was a difficult time for our nation. We all know how difficult it was back then, and we can't change that now, but I am so delighted and proud about the way we treat our service members of all branches today upon their return." "What I have learned from all of this is that you Vietnam veterans did not quit your country. You did not walk away," Rose said. "You helped build the nation that we have today, the strongest military the world has ever seen, and a nation that is built on our values, beliefs and trust. For that, you deserve great respect, honor and the sincerest thanks and appreciation."

As we approach another Memorial Day, please remember those who served and are no longer with us. All of the local Veterans organizations will be holding special ceremonies. I'll have a listing of those in an upcoming column.